Frank E. Huggett

the dutch today

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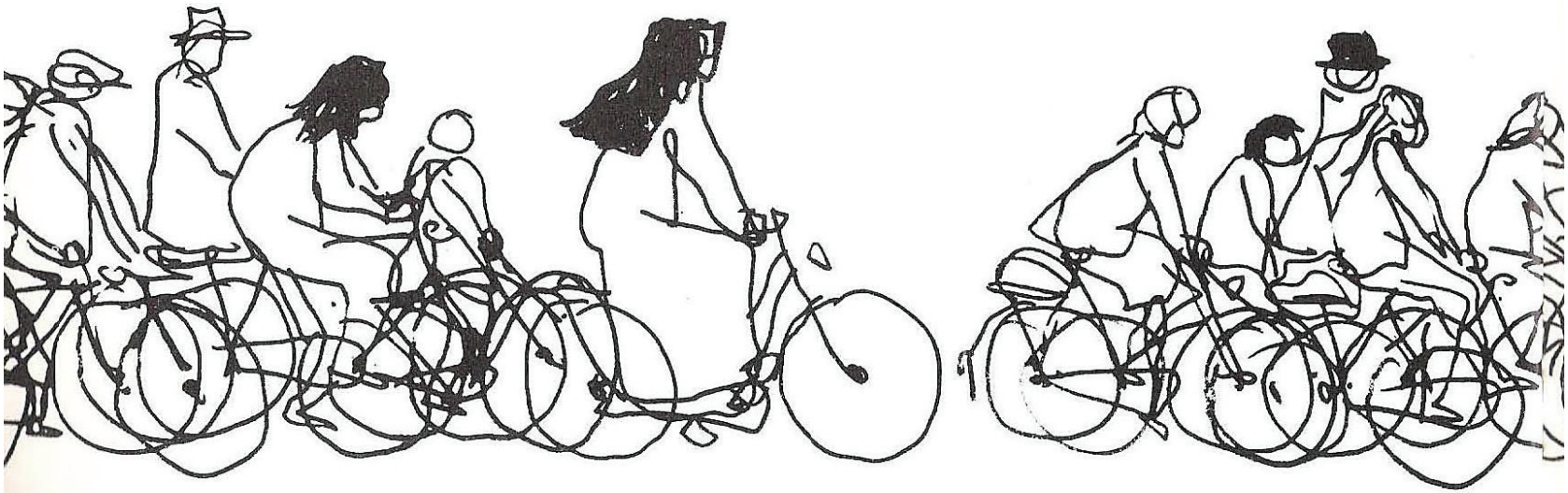
Jenny Dalenoord Drawings

Government Publishing Office, The Hague, 1973
ISBN 90 12 00277 X



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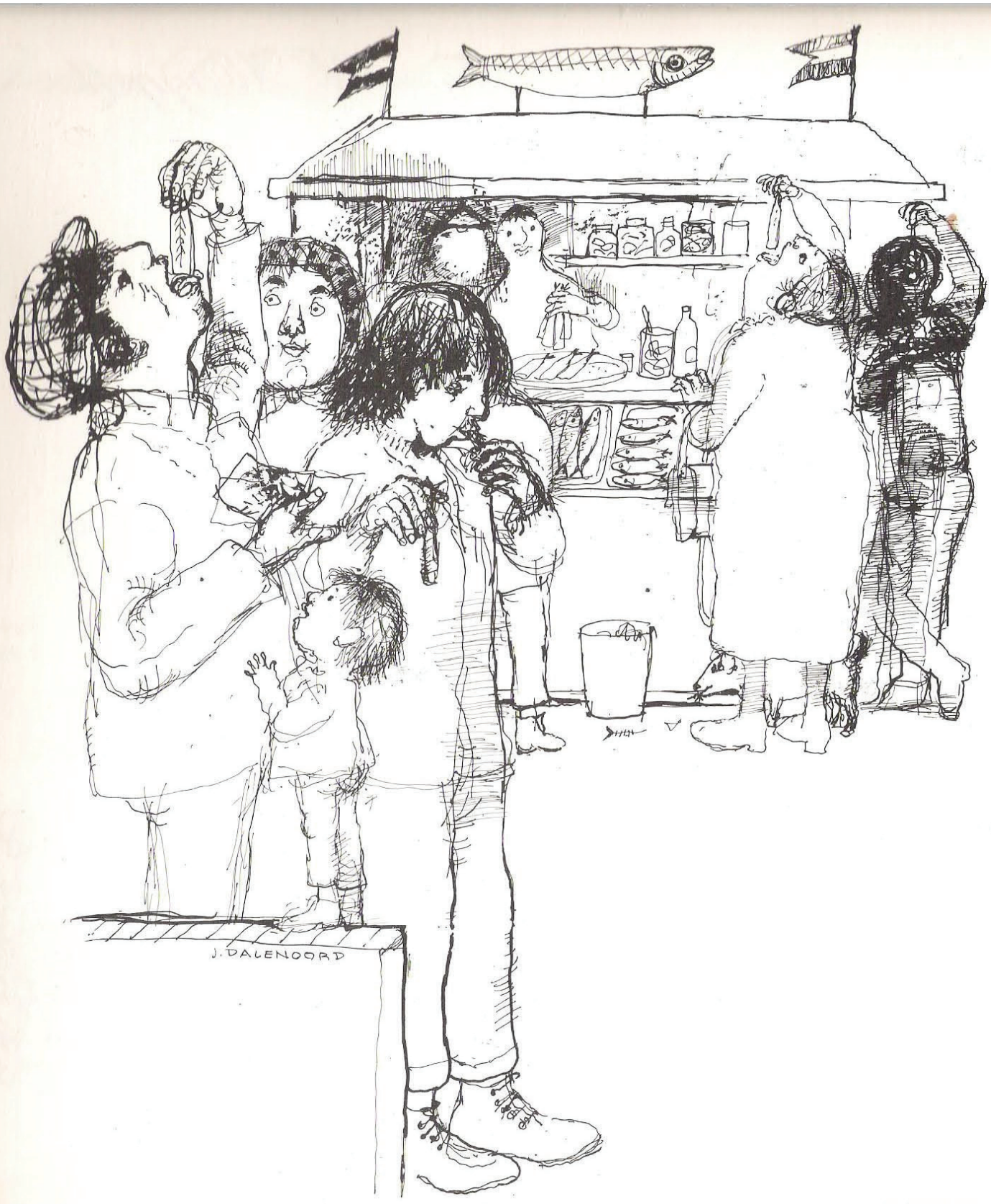
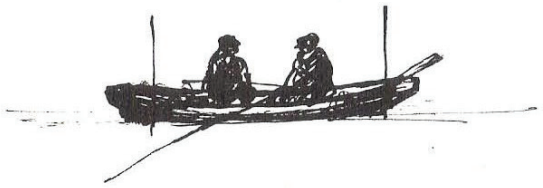

J. DALENOORD

The Netherlands is a country of constant contrasts and contradictions. It is a little scrap of land which would fit comfortably twice over into Scotland or the State of South Carolina; yet it has created, or helped to create, some of the biggest firms outside the United States - Philips, Royal Dutch/Shell and Unilever. It is known as a respectable, conformist country, whose inhabitants are not expected to make extravagant gestures; but over the portals of one of the most celebrated and expensive restaurants in Amsterdam there hangs a large, white anti-war banner. It is a religious country, where even the non-believers take their lack of faith seriously; yet one Catholic church has been given over to young people during the day to make handicrafts for sale to others and pop music for themselves. It is probably one of the most domestic and home-loving countries in the world; but the vast majority of people are content to live in rented flats or houses. It is a nation which fought a protracted eighty-year war against Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for a variety

of reasons – religious, political and dynastic – with the result that it proclaimed itself an independent republic but for the last 150 years or so the Dutch have lived happily under a monarchy. The unexpected has always happened in the Netherlands, but never more so than in the last few years.

The American author, Washington Irving, once wrote a story about Rip van Winkle, a Dutch immigrant in New York, who had a drink with the crew of a mysterious Dutch ship, the *Hendrick Hudson*. He went to sleep for twenty years. When he awoke, his daughter was married, his village had been rebuilt, and the United States had gained its independence. A modern Rip van Winkle who went to sleep shortly after the end of the Second World War would be equally astonished by the changes that have taken place in the Netherlands during the last twenty years. Scarcely any other country in western Europe has made so many fundamental alterations in its attitudes, its economy, its way of life, with such outstanding success and so little friction and violence. It is what some Dutchmen call the silent revolution.



The Netherlands emerged from the last war with Rotterdam, its biggest port, and parts of many other towns, in ruins; 90,000 houses destroyed; and almost a quarter of a million of acres of land under water. Some of the people were eating tulip bulbs just to keep alive: before the end of the war, the Swedes flew in and dropped them bread. In 1949 it lost an empire, the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), a vast archipelago of 3,000 islands, many of them fantastically fertile, which had provided rich supplies of rubber, tea, tin, oil and spices. Four years later the sea broke through the dykes in the south-western part of the Netherlands, flooding more than half a million acres of land and killing 1,835 people.

The post-war outlook seemed black. l'empire lost; war-time wounds. In many ways the Dutch seemed unprepared, by circumstance if not by nature, to cope with these emergencies. The basis of their pre-war life, a large overseas empire, trade, and agriculture, had either disappeared or seemed threatened. There was little natural wealth — few minerals, not a great

In the past, some very

deal of coal. There was little heavy industry: steel production did not start until 1917. And mentally, many of the people seemed to be unprepared for change. Society was rigid and old fashioned: wives could not open a bank account of their own without their husband's permission; it was necessary to obtain parental consent to marry up to the age of thirty; and children could be given only those forenames which appeared on an official list of approved names. There were some parts of the country, strict Calvinist strongholds, where life seemed scarcely to have changed for centuries. The Catholic church, too, was one of the most traditional and authoritarian in Europe.

Now all that has changed. Rotterdam has been rebuilt. It was one of the first cities in post-war Europe to be built in the modern style, with a central shopping precinct for pedestrians only – the Lijnbaan – containing wide, flower-decorated pavements and adjacent cafés, shops and blocks of highrise flats. This has served as a model for similar projects in some other European countries. In the south-west, one of the most ambitious flood prevention schemes ever undertaken – the Delta project – is nearing completion. The economy has been transformed with some 40 per cent of the working population now employed in industry. The Catholic church in the Netherlands has become one of the most progressive in Europe, not only in liturgy but also in social involvement. And many of the Protestants, once separated into segregated sects, have become increasingly interested in unity with each other and in the growing ecumenical movement. The rigidities of society have been broken and are being replaced by a greater openness.

In the past, some very uncomplimentary remarks have been made about the Dutch. Most of the English phrases relating to them, such as Dutch courage, originated in the middle of the seventeenth century when the English waged a ceaseless propaganda campaign against the Dutch as a prelude to the first two Anglo-Dutch wars of 1652-4 and 1665-7. The English aim was to destroy the Dutch supremacy in world trade and

shipping. Although they partially succeeded in doing this, the Dutch have the distinction of being the last nation successfully to invade England, when ships commanded by the brilliant Dutch admiral, Michiel de Ruyter, sailed up the Medway to Gillingham and burnt or captured a number of English warships. The sounds of Dutch gunfire were heard in London.

The tendency for 'Dutch' to be thought of as uncomplimentary has persisted until modern times. Most foreigners wrongly believe that Dutch elm disease started in the Netherlands. They are usually astonished to be told that the disease started elsewhere and that the name is intended as an international scientific tribute to the excellence of Dutch research. At the Forestry Research station in Wageningen two new varieties of elm have now been developed – the Commelin and the Groeneveld – which, it is hoped, may be fully resistant to the disease.

Faced with such ambiguous compliments, the Dutch find that their rather quiet and restrained sense of humour helps. As in England, it can often be directed against themselves.

The Dutch don't shrug their shoulders much, but mentally they are always doing so. They need their sense of humour. It is one of the ways in which they manage to preserve their sense of tolerance towards other people in what is now the most densely populated country in the world.

Over 13 million people live in the Netherlands. The density of population is nearly 1,000 to the square mile, but in the western part of the country it is nearly eight times as high. About five million people live in the *Randstad*, or ring town, which is about the same size as Greater London. Forty-five miles long and forty miles across at its widest point, this huge conurbation contains most of the major towns, including Dordrecht, Rotterdam, Delft, the Hague, Leiden, Haarlem, Amsterdam, Hilversum and Utrecht. What makes it unique is that each city has its own separate major function, and that there are wide open spaces of dairy and agricultural land between the cities.

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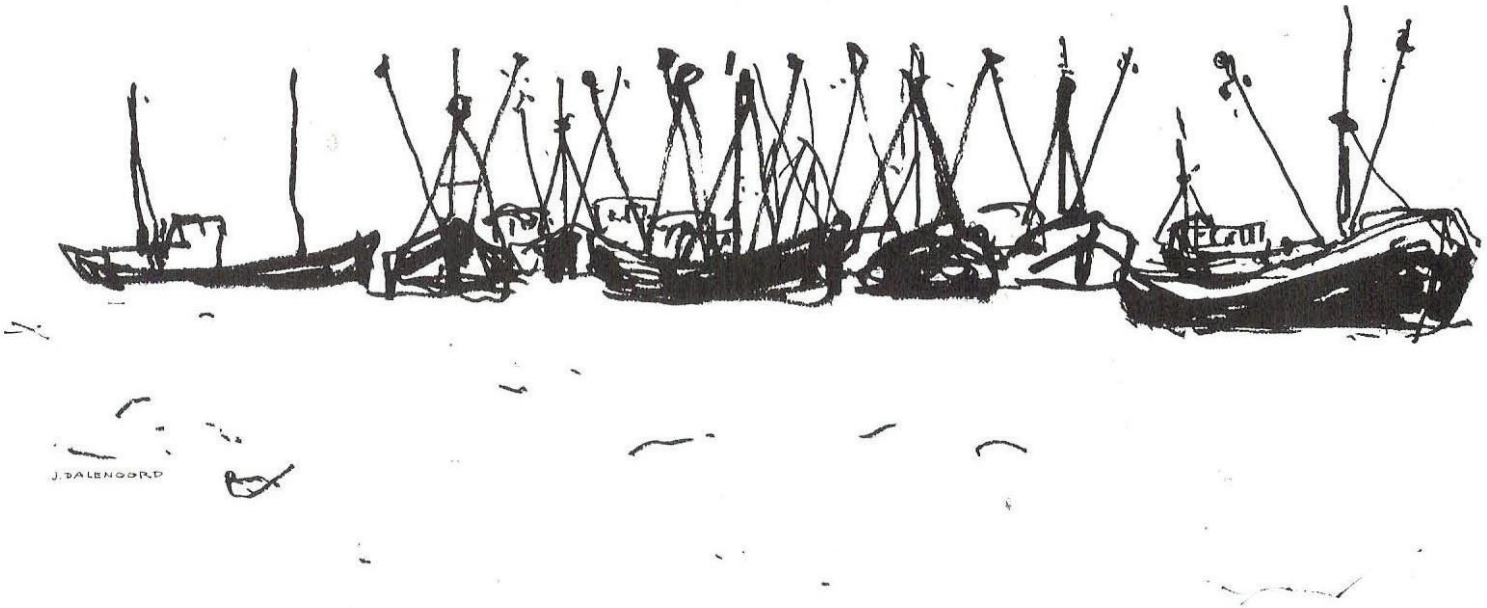
million tons of goods a year. The Hague is the seat of government, with the Houses of Parliament, the foreign embassies, and the International Court of Justice, while Amsterdam, the capital, is the financial and cultural centre. Utrecht is the main communications centre and Hilversum is the radio and television city. The Queen, however, lives in none of these places but in the unpretentious Soestdijk palace, some way outside Utrecht, at Baarn, in what was once the hunting lodge of the Orange family, the traditional rulers of the country.

Zoetermeer

This horseshoe-shaped conurbation lies with its closed end on the North sea coast and its two open arms enclosing a region of dairy-farming meadows, so that no inhabitant is very far away from either the country or the sea. From the Hague, for example, it takes only fifteen minutes for a flat-rate-fare tram to clank and sway through woodlands and parks to the seaside resort of Scheveningen, which was once the favourite summer residence of the European aristocracy. The huge mansions, converted now into hotels, recall its patrician past, but it has been turned into a coastal resort for the masses, with



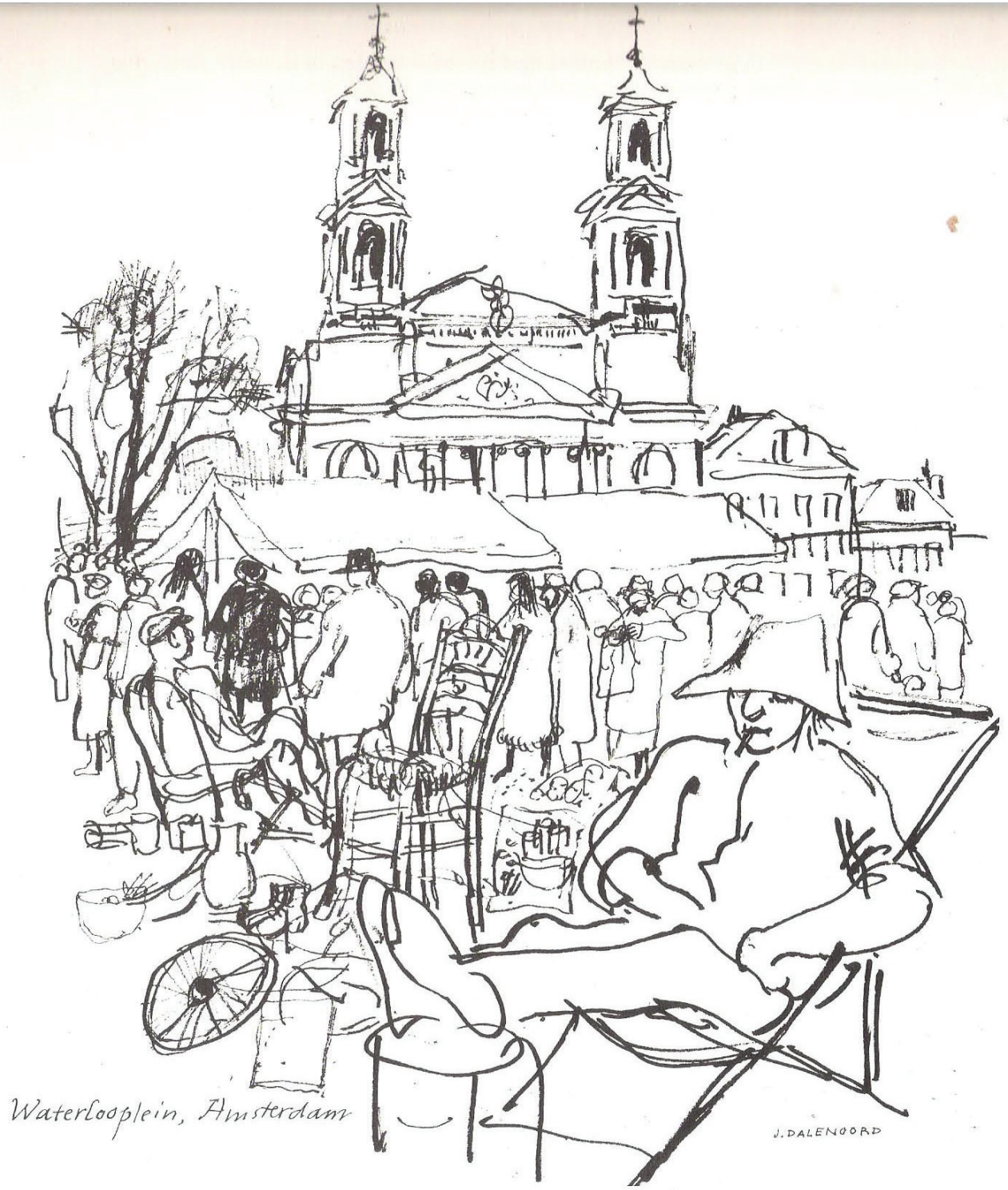
Scheveningen

broad, coloured-tiled promenades, and basketwork chairs and open-air trampolines on the beaches.

Journeys between the separate towns can be made by a frequent service of trains, which leave and depart on the minute, or by a network of good, wide roads: the motorways, which could be built absolutely straight, are deliberately kinked just to keep drivers awake. The flat countryside is ideally suited for surface communications by road, rail or canal, but it is far less suitable for constructing underground systems, because of the difficulties and expense of constructing tunnels in land which is below sea level. Rotterdam, however, now has its subway. Amsterdam is also building one, in which the tunnels are first built above ground and then forced into the earth by compressed air, while the soil below is sucked out. Before the war there was only one tunnel in the whole of the country – the Maas tunnel in Rotterdam – though there were, and still are, plenty of fine bridges. There are now seven tunnels for road traffic and plans for half-a-dozen more.

Driving in the historic centre of some cities can be anything but easy. The narrow bridges over canals, the numerous pedestrian precincts, and the one-way streets, can make it seem like a journey through a maze, with drivers setting out east to reach some destination in the north. The Dutch accept the congestion with a reasonable degree of tolerance, though sometimes the hooting of horns, the throbbing engines of heavy lorries, and the high-pitched drone of mopeds, or *brommers* (buzz-bikes) as the Dutch call them, can sound like an experimental session for a modern industrial symphony.

The city centres, however, do not seem so crowded as, say, Oxford Street in London, or Fifth Avenue in New York. This is partly because there is not just one main entertainment and shopping centre to serve all the residents in the conurbation; each city has its own centre and its own special attractions and character, which are near enough for residents of other cities to sample if they wish. Some of the cities are more crowded than others, particularly Amsterdam in the spring and summer, when thousands of foreign visitors flock into what is now one of the most popular tourist centres in Europe. But even in Amsterdam, the large number of car-free shopping streets, the



Waterlooplein, Amsterdam

comparative smallness, the concentric design, make it an ideal city for the walker or the wanderer.

This is even more noticeable in the Hague, with its central lake right by the Houses of Parliament, its pavement cafés, and its winding arcades, full of flower boxes and floral decorations. A walk round the central square, the Plein, where some of the ministries are situated, particularly on a Monday morning when the shops are closed, really does convince you that the Hague is the largest village in Europe, as the residents half-proudly, half-ironically, proclaim.

If you have to live in a conurbation at all, this is probably the best way to do it. That at least is what some of the world's major planners think, seeing in the Dutch pattern of concentrated decentralisation one of the most favourable models for the development of future conurbations elsewhere. Instead of one large metropolis, or a large number of small, scattered urban centres, there are a few large cities surrounded by a number of smaller towns. The canals create a sharp break between town and country: houses do not extend into a surrounding green belt, but suddenly disappear.

Many of the Dutch, however, would not agree. They find their cities cramped, their lives confined, by the smallness of the country. People in the *Randstad* have an urge to flee.

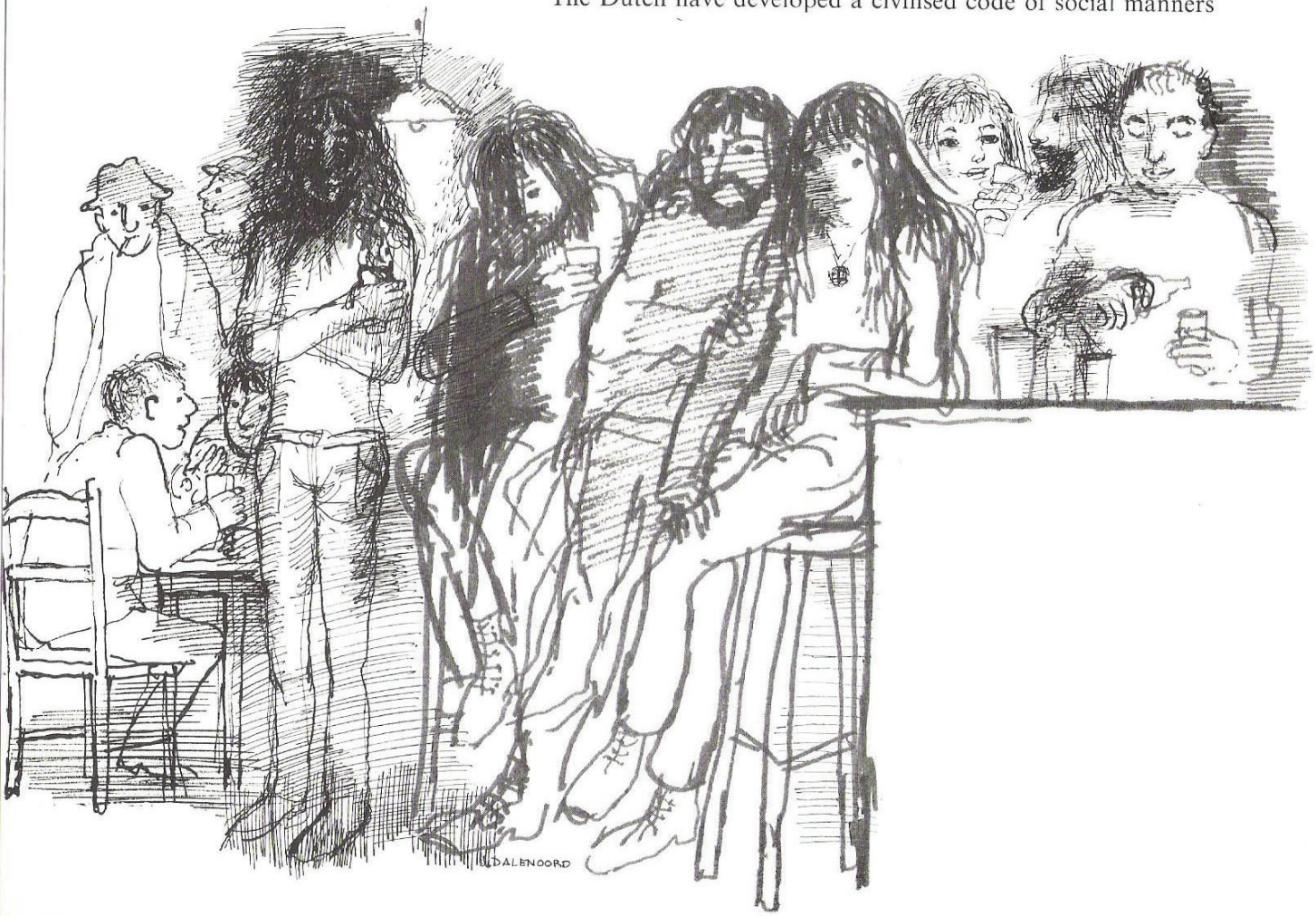
Dutch eyes have turned more frequently to the open sea than inland for escape, but the route to the empire was closed long ago.

In the summer, many of the Dutch are still drawn south to the sun, but an increasing number opt for the spaciousness of Ireland or Scotland instead: the international car-registration letters 'NL' are becoming an increasingly familiar sight on British roads.

The feeling of constriction is understandable. After all, when you are living in a small city like Dordrecht or Leiden, with a population of well under 200,000, it is a little difficult to accept that you are really living in a conurbation containing 5 million people. In Dutch cities small-town manners, customs and curiosity tend to be retained. There is no escape into anonymity as there is in London or New York.

Dutch houses have large windows not only to let the sunlight

in, but also to allow people to see out better. Conversely, the Dutch do not resent other people looking into their own homes, and rarely draw their curtains at night, although in the last few years people have started doing so. Urban life has less exclusiveness than it has elsewhere. Heavy curtains do not cut you off from other people, but equally you become the target for many eyes. People still look or even sometimes stare at you in the street. In conversation, the Dutch have not lost the habit of honestly looking other people straight in the eye. The Dutch have developed a civilised code of social manners



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and behaviour, in which the unexpected is not expected to happen, though because of the Dutchman's inherent individuality, it sometimes does. The ideal is the golden mean. They are polite, but not effusive; not assertive, but insistent on their rights. They neither push nor hustle, but neither do they form queues with quite so much enthusiasm as the English. In shops, the assistants are attentive, but not overbearing; they will leave you alone if that is what you want. They are aware of others, but often involved with themselves. They rarely shout, but neither do they whisper much. They rarely run, except to catch a train, or to post a letter in the box attached to the backs of trams, though even that stimulus has gone now that these 'moving letter boxes' are being abolished. The old people stroll sedately; the young walk in an upright, but relaxed, way.

In social gatherings, the proprieties are observed. At a small reception, the sandwiches and the sherry usually appear separately and at a regulated time. You are expected to listen to the speeches and to ask intelligent questions at the appointed time. At formal gatherings in people's own homes the pattern is little different. Among the upper classes at least, there is a very English sense of controlled politeness, and sometimes the same small cups of tea and thin squares of crustless, cucumber sandwiches. In bars and cafés, there is the same sense of restraint.

This doesn't mean that you can't have fun and contact in the Netherlands. It is very easy to get into conversation with Dutch men and women as 65 per cent of them speak English, many of them with amazing skill. It is not surprising, perhaps, to find taxi-drivers who speak English, though it is a little more astonishing to find many, as I have done, who can discuss traffic problems, travel, and other topics with fluency and intelligence. And there was also the tramdriver who told me in very passable English that this was a self-service tram and that I had to stamp my own ticket on the platform at the back. Most visiting foreigners, and the English in particular, are made to feel welcome in public places. One rainy night in Rotterdam, my wife and I popped into a corner bar for a nightcap before returning to our hotel, and emerged an hour

or so later, having been introduced to almost everyone, and treated to a Dutch gin. But being invited to a Dutchman's home is more difficult, though not impossible. When you are asked in one night for coffee and cakes you will know that you have arrived.

Even more than in England, the Dutchman's home is his castle.

He spends more on flowers and plants for his home than he does on public entertainment. He spends almost as much on books and magazines to read at home and newspapers (which are almost all delivered to the door on a subscription basis), as he does on meals and drinks in hotels and restaurants. An estimated 16 per cent of his annual budget goes on household articles and furnishings, well over twice the proportion in either the United States or Britain.

The Dutch are still domestic, home-loving individuals. The family is the fulcrum – the support and the defence – of their lives. Letters are quite frequently addressed not to Mr. and Mrs. Jong but to the Jong family. A middle-aged man living abroad will write to his aged mother every week; it is not unusual for a married man to take his father for a week's holiday in the summer; mother-in-law is invited to the family celebration in a restaurant.

Family celebrations are the main events in the Dutchman's year. In every house, there is a calendar, usually on the back of the kitchen or lavatory door, with the birthdays not only of the immediate family but also of aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces carefully noted. Birthdays are celebrated with gifts and lunches or dinners, attended by as many of the family as possible. The celebrations are extended to friends and colleagues: in many offices it is usual for fellow-workers to subscribe towards a birthday gift for their colleague.

Weddings tend to be more magnificent than they are elsewhere. People who can afford it – and many can – hire a carriage and pair to take the bride and bridegroom, accompanied by a page and a bridesmaid, family and guests, to the town hall for the civil wedding. Even though the Netherlands is still a religious country, the civil ceremony is the only legal form of marriage:

junk market, den Haag

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an optional church service may be held afterwards. After the wedding there is a reception in the bride's home, with many toasts and long speeches by various members of the family to which everyone is expected to listen. (Not so very long ago receptions were still one- or two-day affairs amongst the rich.) Anniversaries of weddings – copper, silver, golden and diamond – are celebrated just as fully and intensely, with parents and children exchanging gifts. In one rich family I know they gave each other silver medallions.

The structure of the family scarcely varies anywhere: the man is

junk market, den Haag

the breadwinner and the wife rules in the home. Relatively few married women have a job. In 1960, only 170,000 married women went out to work – less than 3 per cent of the total. By 1971, however, the number had almost trebled, to 483,000. More middle class women now continue working in their professional careers and working class wives take a job so that they can buy a new car or a colour television set. But it is still unusual for a mother of young children from any class to go out to work. The main reason is the reverence for the family and the home.

The Dutch have always been noted for the cleanliness of their homes and towns, though they themselves complain that the streets and canals in many towns are not nearly so clean and tidy as they once were. Even in the seventeenth century, the wooden bucket and the round-headed mop were always near at hand as we can see in those delightful Dutch paintings of interiors. Visitor after English visitor, from the seventeenth-century ambassador, Sir William Temple, onwards have commented on 'the great neatness' of their homes. It is no different today. Housewives have a passion for cleaning, dusting, sweeping, scrubbing, and mopping, which the furnishing of their homes seems deliberately designed to encourage. There are tile and parquet floors to be cleaned and polished; rugs on the tables and sofas to be beaten and banged; potted plants to be tended; and sometimes hundreds of souvenirs and knick-knacks to be dusted. Then there is the washing, most of which is done at home: even in 1964, three-quarters of the homes had washing machines. And the shopping, the cooking, the sewing. . . The housewife does most of her work unaided. There are few domestic servants and the husband, especially in the older age groups, is not expected to help with the washing-up, the shopping, or the cleaning, though this is changing, particularly among the younger generation. But in some homes, the housewife still cleans the family's shoes. It is no wonder that some Dutchmen married to English or American women find them domineering.

Family life, however, is not so backward and old-fashioned as it might seem. The Dutch have adapted to the modern pattern of the nuclear family, composed of parents and their children, just as successfully as people in other industrial countries.

Young couples get a house of their own as soon as they can; grandparents tend to live apart in old people's homes or in their own house or apartment. But the Dutch have been determined to retain the cosy elements of domestic life, which they have always loved, and have been more successful than many other nations in maintaining close links with the extended family of aunts, uncles and in-laws. (That is one reason for the popularity of the telephone in the Netherlands; there are more proportionately than in West Germany, France or Italy.) Financially, too, the husband and wife are more of a partnership than in some other industrialised countries. Under a recent law, neither of them may sell or let part of their house, make excessive gifts to other people, or sign hire purchase agreements without the other's consent. The Dutch live the way they do because they like it and not because they know no other way. They are true conservationists and conservatives (in the non-political sense) retaining all that is worthwhile and appealing from the past.

So much has altered, yet so much is still unchanged. That, for me at least, is one of the major charms of the country. Little of any real value is ever lost. Going back to the Netherlands is always like re-entering some warm, cosy room. In the streets, there are still the same bicycles, ridden now more through choice than necessity, which are fit for a queen and therefore anyone else. (You could try riding one yourself, as they can be hired from about £1 to £2 a week. But you have to be born Dutch if you want to ride impassively along a crowded street, with heavy lorries and cars thundering by, just as if you were out for a quiet ride in the countryside). In the streets there are still those ornately-decorated street organs and those same stalls, selling raw herring which, so Dutch gourmets say, should be swallowed like oysters, not chewed. There are still the same cosy little bars, with their dark panelled walls, their shaded lights and their tables covered with heavy rugs – just as tables have always been covered, from the seventeenth century when Dutch merchants brought rugs back from the Middle East. And along by the canals there are those same merchants'

houses that can be seen in so many seventeenth-century Dutch paintings.

What gives the country its atmosphere is the concentration of fine detail. Space has always been a precious commodity here. If the Dutch had not dammed the rivers, dyked the sea, and drained the land, about half the country would still lie under water. The saving of space, the arrangement of objects in a harmonious whole is a major characteristic of the Dutch. Look at any street: one in the old, semi-circular heart of Amsterdam, ringed by its concentric canals, will do. At first sight it looks

uniformly elegant with its rows of tall merchant's houses facing the canal. All the houses are built of small bricks and are only faced with stone, which has always been scarce in the Netherlands and has, therefore, to be imported. All of them have those characteristic Dutch gables, which seem to bow slightly to the gables opposite. None of the houses is dominant; there is a symmetrical harmony, which stems from the town planning enforced in Amsterdam from the seventeenth century. But a closer inspection reveals the mass of fine detail which gives the whole its individual feeling. Some of the gables are geometrically stepped; others are plain and smoothly curved; some are richly decorated. Steep flights of stone steps lead up to the front door, bordered by an iron handrail supported on slender balustrades, which match the railing along the side of the canal and the more sturdy iron bollard for tying up the barges situated right on the edge of the canal among the overshadowing lime trees. The pavement slopes a little irregularly, giving each cobblestone its individual slant. The road humps over the canal. No surface is unbroken, no space is wasted even here: from the walls of the canal hang wooden boxes containing flowers. The attention to detail is continued inside the houses. On the ledge of the net-curtained window, there is a row of potted plants, interspersed with knick-knacks – strangely-shaped shells, paperweights, a piece of coral, miniature vases – small, but to the Dutch, strangely significant things.

The Dutch have always loved small objects. In the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and in other museums elsewhere, many examples can be seen of those exquisite early seventeenth-century Dutch cabinets on stands. Some are covered with tortoiseshell over red foil; others have painted panels whose subjects, biblical or country scenes, were chosen by the purchaser. In the small drawers of the cabinet, the owner kept his hoard of personally precious things – stones, exotic shells, small scientific objects. The same passion is revealed in the Dutch still-life paintings of the seventeenth century: an arrangement of common everyday objects – a comb, a newspaper, a knife, a key, a watch, a piece of sealing wax. It is displayed, too, in the Dutch interiors of the same

Amsterdam.

period, in the paintings of Jan Steen, of Johannes Vermeer, of Pieter de Hooch and others. The objects are diverse, but commonplace, whether it be a painting of a merchant's house or of a peasant's home. Scattered on the floor there is a seemingly haphazard collection of everyday objects – a bowl, a shoe, an apple, a mallet. The floor is often the focal point of the painting: no less than the familiar objects themselves, it represents some security. The Dutch have always had an interest in the small detail, in substance rather than in show. Although there are still, and always have been, visionaries among the Dutch, this passion for detail has persisted to the present day: it is firmly embedded in the Dutch character. They like things to be well ordered and well arranged; to have everything – and everyone – in its proper place. No stone should ever be left unturned. That is why the Dutch can seem to be such hard bargainers: no detail is too small to remain unexamined; no small defect must be left unexposed. The same characteristic can lead to what sometimes seems to be hair-splitting arguments and discussions: whether one car should be taken or two, whether a tunnel or a bridge should be built. It is in such areas that the Dutch like to dwell. The significance of detail also helps to create their sense of earnestness: there are many problems all of equal weight on their mind. But how can this be reconciled with their barely-concealed sense of humour and the pervasive feeling of warm humanity?

It is difficult and dangerous to generalise about any nation, but there does seem to be an essential duality in the Dutch. They appear to be earnest and conformist, a little rigid, and sometimes even disputatious; but, inside, there is always a warm, expansive individual waiting to burst out. Nowhere is this duality better illustrated than in the Amstelkring Museum of Our Lord in the Attic in Amsterdam. From the outside, this museum looks little different from the neighbouring seventeenth-century merchant's houses. Indeed, that is what it once was – three houses built by a hosier, Jan Hartman, in 1661. The living room has a plain classical simplicity and symmetry, with its tall, well-proportioned windows, its panelled ceiling, its heavy furniture, its walnut cupboard-bed and its religious paintings and its portraits. Only the ornately-twisted

marble columns of the solid monumental mantelpiece give some clue as to what will be found upstairs.
Climbing up the narrow stairs to the attic, which runs the length of the three houses, you find a concealed chapel, breathtaking in its unexpected baroque beauty, its ornate beauty of blue and gold, its silver angels and sanctuary lamp. The chapel was built after the war of independence against Spain, when Catholicism was officially proscribed in the Netherlands, though the city fathers of Amsterdam, with a traditional tolerance, turned a blind eye to such chapels, of which there were once twenty-six in Amsterdam alone. For me, this chapel has come to symbolise the country in a number of different ways. There is first of all the tolerance and the passion for religion. There is the austere, rather cold, beauty of the living room, contrasted with the concealed warm splendour of the chapel. And there is the Dutchman living with his feet firmly planted on the ground, but with his head in the clouds, the practical and pragmatic man and the visionary combined.

With the great importance of family life, it is not surprising that housing should have been one of the main matters of concern in the post-war years. Since the last war more than two million new homes have been built – over half the total number. But because of the density of population, there is still a housing shortage in the western part of the country. In most major cities there are lines of houseboats moored on the canals, and areas of sub-standard houses, like the rows of flats and houses with their small backyards and tin baths hanging on the outside wall, which is what the traveller by train sees first when he approaches Rotterdam from the south.
But the Dutch are more self-critical about their housing than they need be. It is true that a number of the houseboats are rather decrepit old barges which have been converted into homes because no other accommodation is available. But many more are comfortable, well-furnished dwellings, with electricity and water, which, with typical Dutch inventiveness, have flowers and plants growing on the roof. Others are occupied by Dutch students or by 'drop-outs' from other countries, who

have bought an old, cheap barge and converted it into a psychodelic 'paradise'. None of them is any worse than the colonies of caravan homes, or what are euphemistically called, mobile homes, to be found on the outskirts of cities in Britain and the United States. And the Netherlands is not the only country to have sub-standard houses; they are to be found in their thousands in many British and American cities. What the Dutchman calls a 'slum', the English or American visitor would describe as a few streets of rather bleak and cheerless houses. The unique structure of the *Randstad* has prevented the growth

of vast areas of urban blight, such as those to be found in Washington or in London: sub-standard houses are dispersed among the various cities.

The Dutch are also acutely conscious of the defects of their post-war housing. Almost everyone has his own favourite tale of the intolerable trials of life in a new apartment block: the thin walls through which every whisper can be heard; the noise of young children above and of the teenager and his transistor below; of doors that do not shut properly and of cupboards which are too small; of unwelcome encounters on the common balcony. But these, again, are international problems, and not specifically Dutch. On the whole, housing standards in the Netherlands are no lower than in most other industrialised countries and, in some ways, higher.

Since the end of the war, house building has been rigidly controlled in both the private and the public sectors. Planning is stricter than it is in England. This doesn't mean that the Dutch are afraid to experiment with new designs for living. There are a growing number of experimental projects. In the Overvecht-Noord district of Utrecht, there are plans for blocks of low rise flats of four to seven storeys, with entrance halls on each floor large enough for communal activities, but with the privacy of each flat carefully preserved. In Enschedé, there will be a row of one-family houses with some bedrooms opening out on to the walled garden and other bedrooms built over part of the living room with its sunken floor. Dr. Fiedeldij Dop, one of the country's best-known child psychiatrists, is among the founders of a small group of architects, builders, social workers and others, who have created an organisation – New Living Forms – to build houses fit for people, instead of houses in which people can fit. It has already built some houses at Eindhoven, with open spaces outside the homes instead of formal gardens, and open spaces inside, with large nooks and corners instead of dividing walls. Since 1968, the government has given an extra subsidy for experimental building projects.

Most people live in accommodation that is rented from a private landlord, a housing association, or the municipal authority. It is by no means unusual to find senior civil

servants or business executives living in rented homes: only about one-third of all flats and houses are owner-occupied. Housing of all kinds, including private homes, is heavily subsidised and rents are controlled at a low figure. Though rents have been rising in the last few years, they are still very low by English or American standards. A house or flat in Amsterdam or the Hague, which the Dutch find scandalously expensive, would cost four or five times as much to rent in London. On average, the Dutchman spends about 7 per cent of his income on rent, though this has started to increase in the last few years.

The Dutch were the first nation to build upwards on any scale. Because of the shortage of land, their houses from the seventeenth century onwards have tended to be tall and narrow, with steep staircases. Even now escalators, or moving stairways, in modern department stores tend to rise more steeply and to be less wide than they are elsewhere. The Dutch are accustomed to this space-saving perpendicularity, as any visitor will realise when he sees a Dutchman scale a flight of almost vertical stairs with two heavy suitcases in his hand almost as easily as if he were walking across a room. 'Be careful of the stairs', residents in old houses say to their foreign visitors as regularly and unthinkingly as English owners of converted country cottages tell tall visitors to mind their head. But these seventeenth-century houses are not high by present-day standards and they were homes for just one merchant and his family. The Dutch have been reluctant to follow the international pattern of building upwards in the post-war years and until the early Sixties constructed very few highrise flats. But the housing shortage forced them to do so, and almost half of the apartment blocks built in 1968 had nine or more storeys. Nevertheless, they still do not dominate the landscape. Far more typical is the four- or five-storey block, with the very large picture windows, a traditional feature of Dutch architecture, which, however, from the outside, make the rooms appear somewhat smaller than they really are. The straight lines of the system-built structure are often broken up by striped sun awnings, which gave a more colourful air. Intelligent use is usually made of natural or man-made

features – canals, lakes, trees, grass – in the landscaping of new developments. As might be expected there is a careful attention to detail, with ramps beside flights of steps for wheeling bicycles or prams, and sunken pools, like the one in the De Halve Maan district of Utrecht, which can be used for paddling in the summer and skating in the winter.

The typical subsidised dwelling of today contains a living room, a kitchen, two or more bedrooms, a lavatory, and a shower room rather than a bathroom. On average the number of rooms is just over five per dwelling, which is more than in most European countries, including Germany and Sweden. Nearly three-quarters of all dwellings have baths or showers and the same percentage of all newly-built flats and houses have central heating. The new Council apartments are certainly no worse than some owner-occupied flats – or 'little boxes' – in the more favoured residential areas of London.

Yet, many of the Dutch remain dissatisfied with their housing. What they really prefer is their own house with a garden, and, indeed, 60 per cent of all new dwellings are one-family houses. The passion for privacy is so great that many flat-dwellers look back longingly to the pre-war days when some flats had their own separate entrance on the ground floor. It seems doubtful whether four flights of steep, narrow stairs, in their own dark passageway, is a more pleasant entrance to a home than shared stairs and a common balcony. Many Dutchmen, however, would not agree!

The housing problem has been caused by a number of different factors, but mainly by the increase in population in the post-war years. The Netherlands has one of the lowest death rates in the world – 8.3 per thousand compared with 9.5 in the United States and 11.9 in Britain. The infant mortality rate – 12.7 per 1,000 live-born children – is almost the lowest in the world. And the birth rate – 18.3 per thousand – is one of the highest in Europe, though it is now rapidly declining. As a result the population increased from 10.2 million in 1950 to 13 million twenty years later. The greatest increase occurred in the already overcrowded *Randstad* and many of the children born in the less populated provinces of Friesland, Drenthe and

Overijssel move to the *Randstad*, too, when they grow up. At the same time, increased prosperity has created a demand for separate and more commodious homes: young couples are no longer content to share a house with their parents. But there is just not enough land for everything, for building houses, growing crops, making parks and other recreational areas, so the Dutch have had to create more land for themselves.

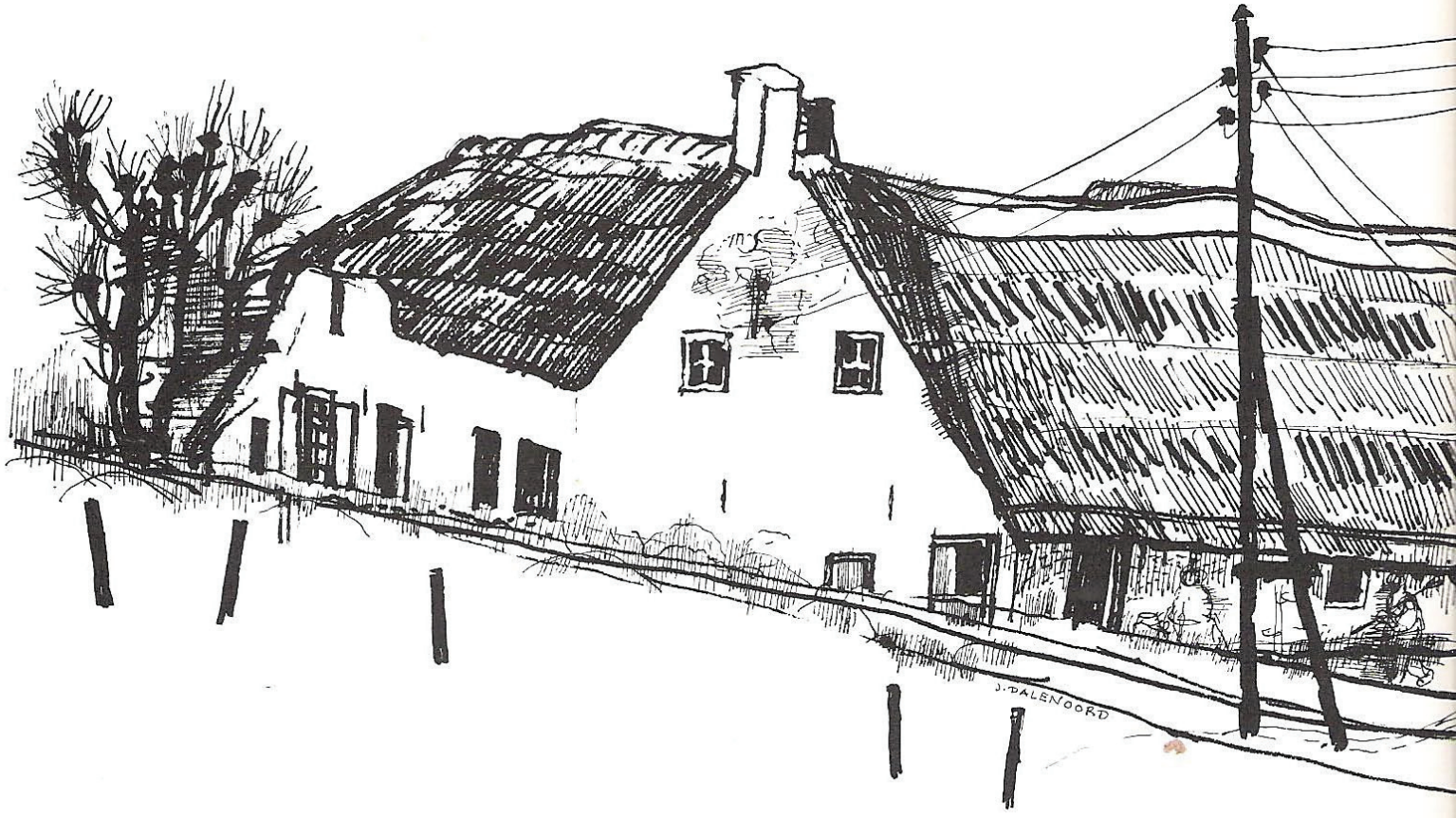
Sooner or later, when writing about the Netherlands, one always

has to come back to the subject of land reclamation. So much has been said, and written, about the subject, that the story has lost much of its impact. But the centuries-old struggle of the Dutch to master the sea is really a most remarkable achievement, a continuing saga.

Today, the Netherlands is renowned for the neat geometrical appearance of its landscape. But originally much of it was a wild, untamed, desolate region which terrified even the invading Romans. Their ships were often struck at night by huge floating trees uprooted from the banks of lakes and rivers; the masts became entangled with the branches. In the south-west, the great European rivers of the Rhine and the Maas (Meuse) created a huge swampy delta, a region of large and small islands, lakes and shifting dunes of sand shaken ceaselessly, like some giant kaleidoscope, into new patterns by the waves and winds of the North Sea. In the north the lines of sand dunes were frequently breached and broken by the incursions of the sea, creating the chain of small isolated Frisian Islands, separated from the mainland by the Wadden Sea. On the mainland, there was a low-lying peaty swamp, with hundreds of small lakes, some of them created artificially by peasants who dug up the peat for fuel and used the salty ashes for preserving fish and meat.

For many centuries the Dutch have struggled to create a new land out of the sea, at first, in northern Friesland with their bare hands, wicker baskets and primitive sledges. Over the course of many years, the Frisians built huge mounds of earth, called *terpen*, some of which were 40 acres in extent. Pliny, who visited the region in A.D.47, described how the inhabitants

resembled 'sailors in ships when the water covers the surrounding land, but shipwrecked people when the tide was retired'. Later, dykes, or sea walls, were built to protect the countryside from flooding, with a flap gate which let water flow out into the sea at low tide and stopped it coming in at high tide. (The story of the boy with his finger in the dyke is a colourful invention of the nineteenth-century American writer, Mary Mapes Dodge, though in the 1953 floods some villagers of Colijnsplaat put their shoulders to a wall of sandbags in a dyke to hold the water back until it went down.)



dike-farmhouse, river Lek

At the beginning of the fifteenth century windmills started to come into use. They had scoop wheels with buckets attached which carried the excess water away from the drainage ditches and discharged it into a ring canal round the reclaimed land, so that it could be discharged into the sea. The first windmills could only raise water five feet, so they were sometimes built in a series of three or more, to carry the water up to a higher level. There were also industrial windmills, which were used for many purposes, including grinding wheat, sawing wood, turning rags into paper, and even grinding snuff and spices. The windmills were also used as primitive semaphore stations: messages could be sent for miles across the flat, open countryside by altering the position of the wings, or sails. When one pair of sails were exactly vertical and the other pair were horizontal, it indicated that the mill was ready to start working. A slight turn of the sails backwards indicated a birth; a slight turn onwards, a death. For marriages, or other celebrations, the sails were decorated with flags, rosettes, hearts of tin, and angels blowing trumpets. In the nineteenth century the windmills were gradually replaced by steam pumps and now there are modern diesel or electric pumping stations, the largest of which can pump out over 100,000 cubic feet of water a minute.

There are still about 1,000 windmills in the country, of which about 300 are used for pumping water or grinding wheat, though it is no longer necessary to use them for either purpose. The days of the windmill were over long ago, but some of them are still kept in use through affection. The Star (De Ster) windmill in Rotterdam, which was burnt down in 1962 has been carefully rebuilt and is now again grinding spices and snuff.

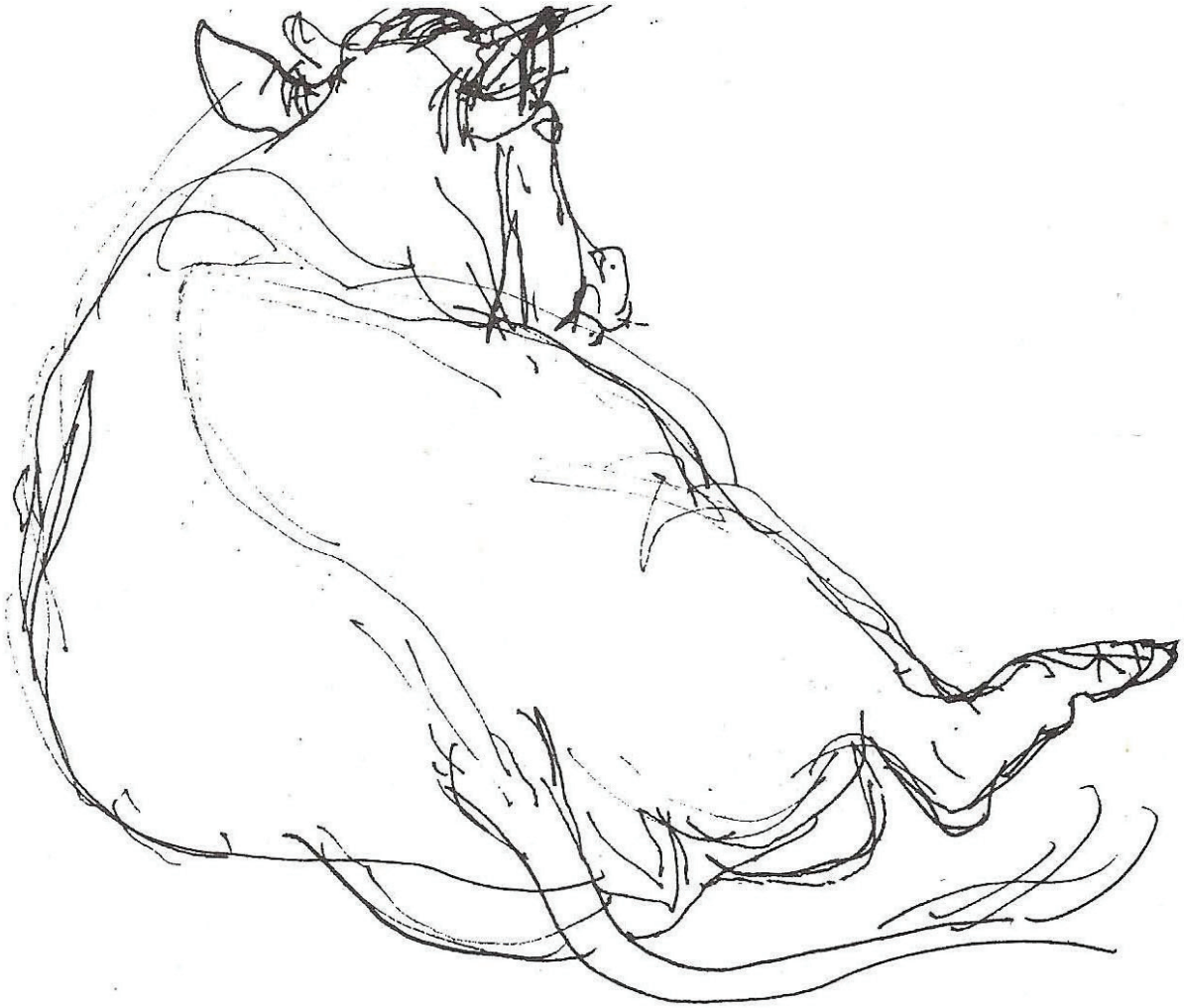
The Dutch have an equal affection – though some of them won't admit it – for those famous fields of tulips around Haarlem and Leiden which cover the earth with a patchwork quilt of colour in the spring. And even wooden clogs strike some chord of history in the Dutch, though you will not see many clogs outside the souvenir shops, except on some farms and in some gardens in the north. (I did once see a road workman in Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, wearing a pair.)

Clogs, tulips, windmills have become the image of the Netherlands, and though the Dutch don't really mind that, accepting it with a good-humoured tolerance, what they really do resent, and quite rightly too, is the lingering idea that there is nothing else. Even the spectacular, technical, engineering, and social achievements in land reclamation should have been sufficient in themselves to destroy the old-fashioned image of the country.

The Dutch have been reclaiming land from the sea for many centuries, but it is only in this century that modern technology

Hoge Beintum, Friesland

has enabled them almost to manipulate the sea at will. (No one realises better than the Dutch, however, that the sea still represents an ultimate danger.) The first major project was the draining of the former Zuyder Zee, which involved the construction of a 19-mile-long barrier dam connecting the provinces of North Holland and Friesland. Since 1932, you have been able to drive along the road on top of the dam with the sea on one side and what is now a freshwater lake – Lake IJssel – on the other. The remainder of the seabed will form five huge polders of reclaimed land, totalling 550,000 acres,



which will add about 7 per cent to the size of the country. Four polders have already been created; the fifth, the Markerwaard, will be ready by 1980. . .

For those people who live nearby – and Amsterdam is right on the doorstep – it has been like watching the creation of part of the world in less than a lifetime. When a polder first emerges from the water it is a bleak and depressing sight. I shall never forget the first time I saw the polder of South Flevoland. It was winter and the snow still lay lightly on the bleak wastes of sludge and mud, interspersed with pools of water, which

Zuid-Holland Stompwijk

stretched as far as the wreaths of swirling mist would allow the eye to see. If I ignored the car in which my friend had brought me, and the occasional sound of a passing car or lorry, it was just as it must have been in the beginning when the land rose from the sea. There were no animals, no birds, not even any insects. Only the relics of vanished civilisations, lying somewhere in that vast expanse of mud, would have shown that people had been there centuries before: the wooden beams and broken spires of churches which had disappeared below the sea, the shipwrecked boats, and at a deeper level, the bones of prehistoric animals and the remains of human skeletons, some of them dating from 2500 B.C. But the former sea bed was still too wet and treacherous for me to walk on it.

The first stage in transforming this barren muddy waste into land fit for crops and people is to sow it with reed seeds which are dropped from aeroplanes and helicopters. The reeds suck up the moisture, while the sun and air help to dry out the soil. These activities attract other forms of life. As the land is being drained, gulls fly in from the coast to investigate; the swampy reeds become a breeding ground for midges, flies, and bees. After a year the reeds are cut down and burnt. The land is ploughed and sown with rape seed, whose oil can be used for making margarine. This is followed by cereal crops.

As the land is cultivated, animals start to move in. Mice and voles arrive and attract their natural enemy, the kestrel. Larger animals, rabbits and deer, cross the frozen waters of the lakes in winter to stake their claims in the new lands. Grass and fast-growing trees, like willows and poplars, are planted; roads are built; fields are formed; farmers' houses are constructed. Soon there is very little to indicate that all of this is not as nature intended, apart from the straightness of the roads and the regularity of the fields. From the air the polders look like an exercise in geometry, or an abstract painting with a yellow background split up into squares and rectangles by straight strokes of green, on which blobs of blue have been superimposed.

Originally, the main purpose of the Zuyder Zee works – apart from flood prevention – was to provide more agricultural land. But after the Second World War, with the growth of

population and the changes in the economy, it was decided to make more use of the land for industry, recreation and housing, too. Wooded areas, with picnic sites, were created; the shores of lakes were slightly kinked to give them a more natural appearance; camping grounds were laid out; bird sanctuaries were formed.

It was also decided to build a large central town in the polders, to be called Lelystad, after Cornelius Lely, the originator of the scheme. In 1967, the first families moved in, and since then Lelystad has become one of the fastest growing towns in the Netherlands. Today, this pioneer town, with its modern foot-bridge pavements for pedestrians, stands in the centre of thousands of acres of fields and woods, where fifty years ago there was nothing but the sea.

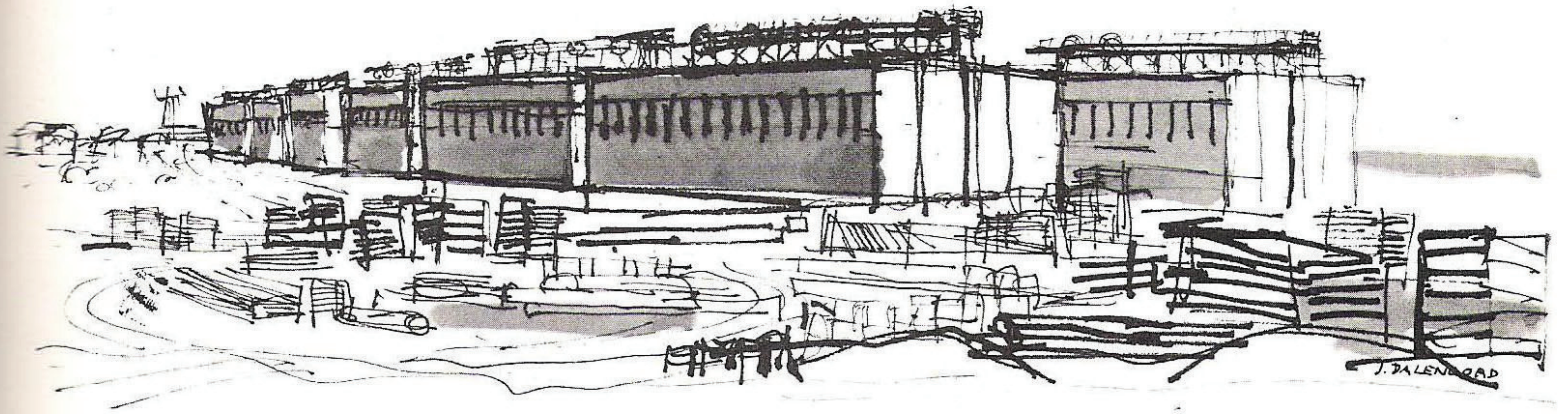
In the south western part of the Netherlands an equally ambitious scheme was started after the disastrous floods of 1953 – the Delta project. This involves damming four estuaries in the Zeeland islands, south-west of Rotterdam, and erecting a storm-tide barrier in the Hollandse IJssel, near Rotterdam. The barrier has a massive steel gate, weighing 635 tons, which is suspended between two tall towers and can be lowered if there is any danger of a flood tide coming upstream from the North Sea.

New techniques have been used in the construction of the dams, including overhead cableways which dump hundreds of tons of imported stone or domestically-made concrete blocks on to the river bed, and huge concrete caissons, which are towed into position by tugs and then flooded so that they sink to form a dam.

The Delta project is due to be finished by 1978. Very little land will be reclaimed, but the coastline will be considerably shortened, so that there is less danger of flooding. The project will also prevent the progressive salination of agricultural land by the sea, and the isolated islands of Zeeland and South Holland will be linked by fast roads over dams and bridges to the mainland, so that the islands can be used for recreation and overspill housing for people who work in Rotterdam.

There are also proposals to reclaim the Wadden Sea, which separates the Frisian islands from the mainland in the north.

If this were done, it will probably be the last territorial claim the Dutch will ever make against the sea. But it is almost certain that this project will not be undertaken, as these isolated islands and the Wadden Sea are so useful for holidays and recreation.
The attitudes towards land reclamation have changed considerably since the Zuyder Zee project was started. Increasing the amount of farming land has become less important than providing land for houses, drinking water from freshwater lakes, and recreational facilities. Biologists and



Caissons Deltaworks

conservationists have become far more conscious of the dangers of upsetting the delicate ecological balance. The Wadden Sea area is renowned as one of the most important bird sanctuaries in Europe. It is one of the major stop-over points on the migratory route from the Arctic circle to Southern Europe, Africa, and even the Antarctic. Hundreds of different birds may be seen there including the Barnacle Goose, the eider, the avocet, the oystercatcher, the sandwich tern, the golden plover, the snow bunting, and many others. For this reason, and the popularity of the area for sailing, fishing, and

Kagerplas

other water sports, there would be great opposition to its being reclaimed. In fact, there is now – albeit on a minor scale – a counter-tendency to flood land which has previously been reclaimed. Already there are plans to flood some of the older, smaller polders, north of Amsterdam, which were reclaimed by Jan Leeghwater in the seventeenth century, so that they can be used for recreation.

Although the Dutch now have the technical skill to alter the balance of land and water in this confident way, the main task still remains, as it always has been, to protect the country from the sea. Without the dykes, the dunes, and the pumping stations, about half of the country would be flooded twice a day. The coastline would stretch from Groningen in the north, through Zwolle, Utrecht, Arnhem, and den Bosch to Breda in the south, and many of the major cities of the *Randstad* would be under water.

Almost inevitably one associates towns and cities with the Netherlands, because the Dutch were the first people in northern Europe to develop well-run, civilised cities for the people. (Amsterdam was the last example of that long mediaeval line of city-states, which stretches back to Venice and Florence.) Most of the best architecture is to be found in the cities: the merchants' houses, the churches as big as cathedrals, and the town halls. There are also some fine castles, many of them moated, on the eastern border, in the centre around Utrecht, and in the southern province of Limburg, where there are a hundred. But the countryside has a great variety and a beauty of its own. The western and northern part is flat. (The only thing the Dutch rarely provide for in their modern reclamation schemes is hills, though there is one in the man-made woods of Amsterdamse Bos in the capital with its trees and shrubs which have been imported from places as far away as China and the Himalayas.)

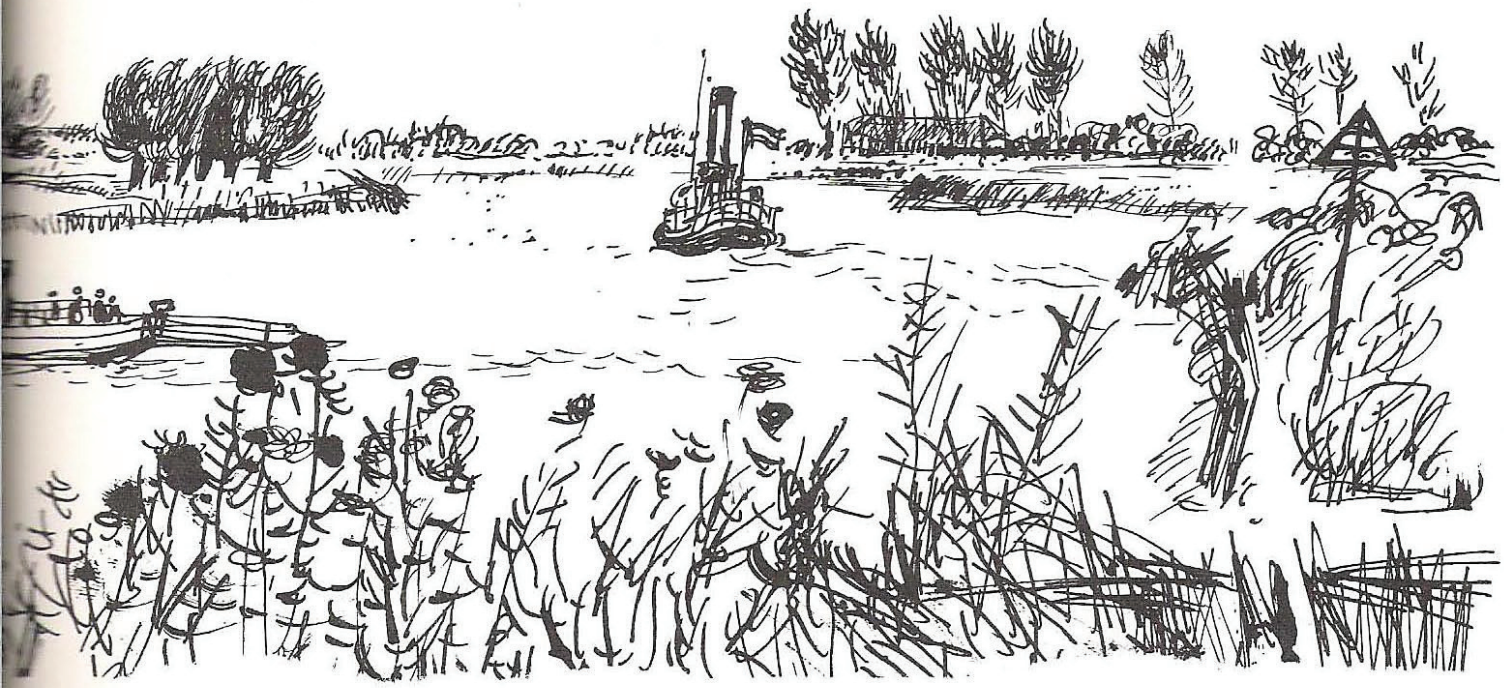
The flat landscape – a Dutch word (landschap) in origin – is anything but uninteresting. It has an immensity and a power of its own. It conceals nothing: on clear days you can see for miles. Every detail is distinct. In contrast to the crowded cities,

there is a great sense of solitude and of silence. The cyclist on the tree-lined road is alone, but for his reflection in the waters of the canal. There is something fundamental about this countryside, where the primal elements still dominate, a feeling of being very close to the origins of nature, with the sense that the earth is only a fragile covering of the waters of the sea and that the over-arching sky, flecked with clouds, is very close. Only the distant city, distinctly visible on the horizon, offers any protection or relief.
The Dutch do not remain unaffected: either they love its

River Yssel, Dieren

powerful isolation or they find it somewhat bare and monotonous.

The Netherlands, however, is not all flat and man-made. In the north-east, there is the province of Drenthe, with its small quiet towns and heather-covered moors where sheep may safely graze. Nearer the centre, there is the province of Gelderland, where the roads rise up towards the wooded heights and the valleys of the national park of Hooge Veluwe, with its red deer, wild boar, and the Kröller-Müller museum containing sculptures and Van Goghs. Further south, there are



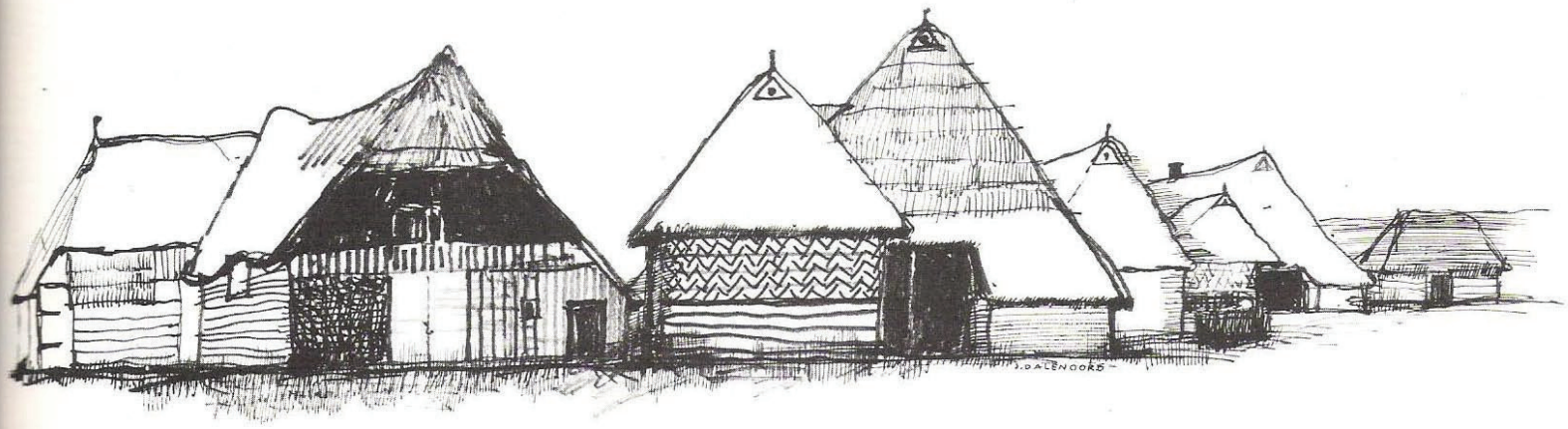
the provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, where the countryside is softer and takes on a more natural shape than in the west. The pastures are rougher, rising into little hillocks and falling into what were once small pools; the streams and rivers wind, choosing a course which has been evolved through the centuries; the trees grow in clumps haphazardly and not in planned and planted places; the vision is held and contained by a line of low wooded hills on the horizon.

Considering that it takes only four hours or so to travel by train from the north of the country to the south, there is a remarkable variety of scenery and of regional styles. The Dutch are very conscious of these differences. A student from the Hague, who had chosen to study at Groningen University, once told me that he found it very difficult at first to understand the dialect of the people there. The local people, on the other hand, think that people from the Hague speak 'with a potato in their mouth'.

Friesland in particular has its own distinctive character. The Frisians have their own language, which three-quarters of the population can speak, but only 11 per cent can write; their own national anthem, the Frysk Folksliet; and their own flag, with its seven water-lily leaves. They have their own sports: pole-vaulting over water; *kaatsen* a game played with a small leather ball between two teams of three men; and the gruelling 125-mile skating across the frozen canals between the eleven towns of the province, which has become a national event that few contestants ever finish. It is a province which is known everywhere for its famous black-and-white cows, but which is also the home of the less well-known black Frisian horse, saved from extinction by a number of local breeders and farmers in 1913.

In the southernmost province of Limburg, which juts down between the French-speaking part of Belgium and Germany, foreign influences flow across the frontiers. French words appear above the shops; more wine is drunk; even the meat in butchers' shops is cut differently and more game birds are eaten. Around Sittard, the spacious Dutch picture-frame windows start to shrink into the smaller German shape while some of the houses have steep Germanic roofs with red

rounded tiles. 'I really like living down here', a Dutch businessman once told me. 'It's so convenient, truly international. If your wife needs large-size dresses you can send her to nearby Aachen to buy her clothes, and if she's slender, she can do her shopping in Liège!'
Yet, wherever one goes, there is a distinctive feeling of being Dutch. What holds these diverse people together? Throughout the centuries the Dutch have learnt to live with their differences. The Frisians haven't had to put up much of a fight to retain their own language, but have even been



Orvelte ; Drente

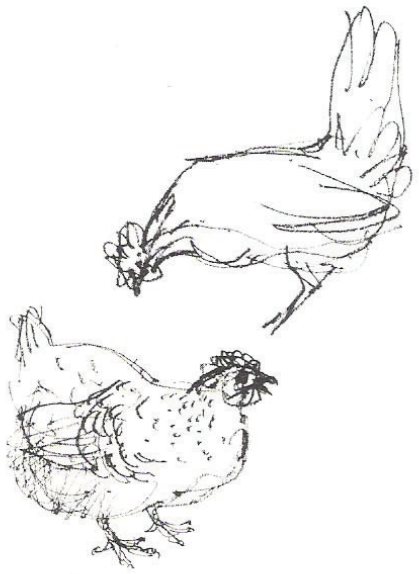
encouraged in some ways to do so. Frisian is taught at five of the country's thirteen universities and higher education institutions. During the Dutch republic, which lasted from the end of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, each town, each province guarded its own autonomy jealously, as they still do to this day. They were brought together by their desire to free themselves from Spanish rule. The Dutch became a nation long before they set up a unified state at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They still remain attached to their provinces. They are patriotic rather than nationalistic,

Pernis

hotels, some of which are owned by Philips, there is always much talk of sales figures and lengthy anecdotes about computers and company personnel. This multinational company has made Eindhoven an international town, bringing in its employees from all parts of the world for training courses and conferences. Tourists from many parts of the world are attracted by the company's *Evoluon*, a spectacular flying-saucer-shaped exhibition hall held aloft by slender pillars, with graphic displays showing the impact of electronics on modern life and man.

There are other industrial towns, too – Arnhem, Breda, Tilburg, for example – but in spite of this dispersion, there are still not enough industries outside the *Randstad*. It is surprising to find that the Netherlands, even though it is such a small country, has problems of regional development which are just as great as those in England. One of these areas is in the farming regions of the north.

The Dutch are still among the most efficient farmers in the world as they always have been. During the seventeenth century, Royalist landowners fled from England to the Netherlands and to Flanders, which is now in the Dutch-speaking, northern part of Belgium. Farmers there on the 'barrenest, Heathie and Sandie Lands' were already producing magnificent crops of oats and providing winter feed and lush pastures for their cattle by sowing turnips and clover. When the exiles returned to England after the Restoration they, too, started growing clover and planting turnips on light soils, which ushered in the English agricultural 'revolution' before the famous, but now discredited, 'Turnip' Townshend was even born. (Dutch engineers were employed during the same century to drain the Fens on the east coast of England.)



The Dutch have always been agricultural innovators. The modern steel and galvanised-iron Dutch barn may be seen in many parts of the world. In the northern provinces of the Netherlands, you can see the modern version and the original side by side, with the thatched roof supported by four stout poles at each corner, which can be raised or lowered to provide

relating to their country through the symbols of national unity and achievement of which they are so proud – the Royal family, the Dutch airline, KLM, the oldest airline in the world operating under its original name, and the Zuyder Zee and Delta works, to which they all contribute through their taxes. But as in all other industrial countries, there are increasing similarities between the regions. The motor-car and the television set are enemies of distinction. The road across the enclosing dam around the IJssel lake has helped to bring the northern province of Friesland and Groningen into more immediate contact with the *Randstad*, just as the new roads across the dams and bridges of the Delta project are helping to drag the islands of Zeeland and South Holland out of their isolation.

For many years there have been a number of big cities and industrial centres outside the *Randstad*. In the north, there is Groningen, which has always been one of the biggest and most important cities; the country's second oldest university, after Leiden, was founded there in 1614. Today, it is as modern a city as any in the Netherlands, or, indeed, in Europe. The university is the fastest-growing in the Netherlands. Some of the main shopping streets are free from traffic. The central market square, still dominated by the high St. Martin's tower, was partly destroyed at the end of the Second World war, and has been rebuilt into a striking blend of old and new: the old Town Hall is joined by a glass-covered bridgewalk to the New Town Hall just behind it. Although the province of Groningen is still a farming region, the industries include chemicals, ready-made clothing, engineering and printing.

In the east there is the modern town of Enschede, the centre of the old-established cotton industry, and in the south the town of Eindhoven, which has been created out of a village by the Philips brothers since the end of the last century. Although other industry, including the Daf car manufacturers, has now moved in, evidence of its origins is still very pronounced. The electronic train indicators on the railway platforms are made by Philips (a Dutch name, even though it sounds so English.) The enormous figure of Jesus rising up above the spire of the main church is illuminated at night by Philips lamps. In the

hotels, some of which are owned by Philips, there is always much talk of sales figures and lengthy anecdotes about computers and company personnel. This multinational company has made Eindhoven an international town, bringing in its employees from all parts of the world for training courses and conferences. Tourists from many parts of the world are attracted by the company's *Evoluon*, a spectacular flying-saucer-shaped exhibition hall held aloft by slender pillars, with graphic displays showing the impact of electronics on modern life and man.

There are other industrial towns, too – Arnhem, Breda, Tilburg, for example – but in spite of this dispersion, there are still not enough industries outside the *Randstad*. It is surprising to find that the Netherlands, even though it is such a small country, has problems of regional development which are just as great as those in England. One of these areas is in the farming regions of the north.

The Dutch are still among the most efficient farmers in the world as they always have been.

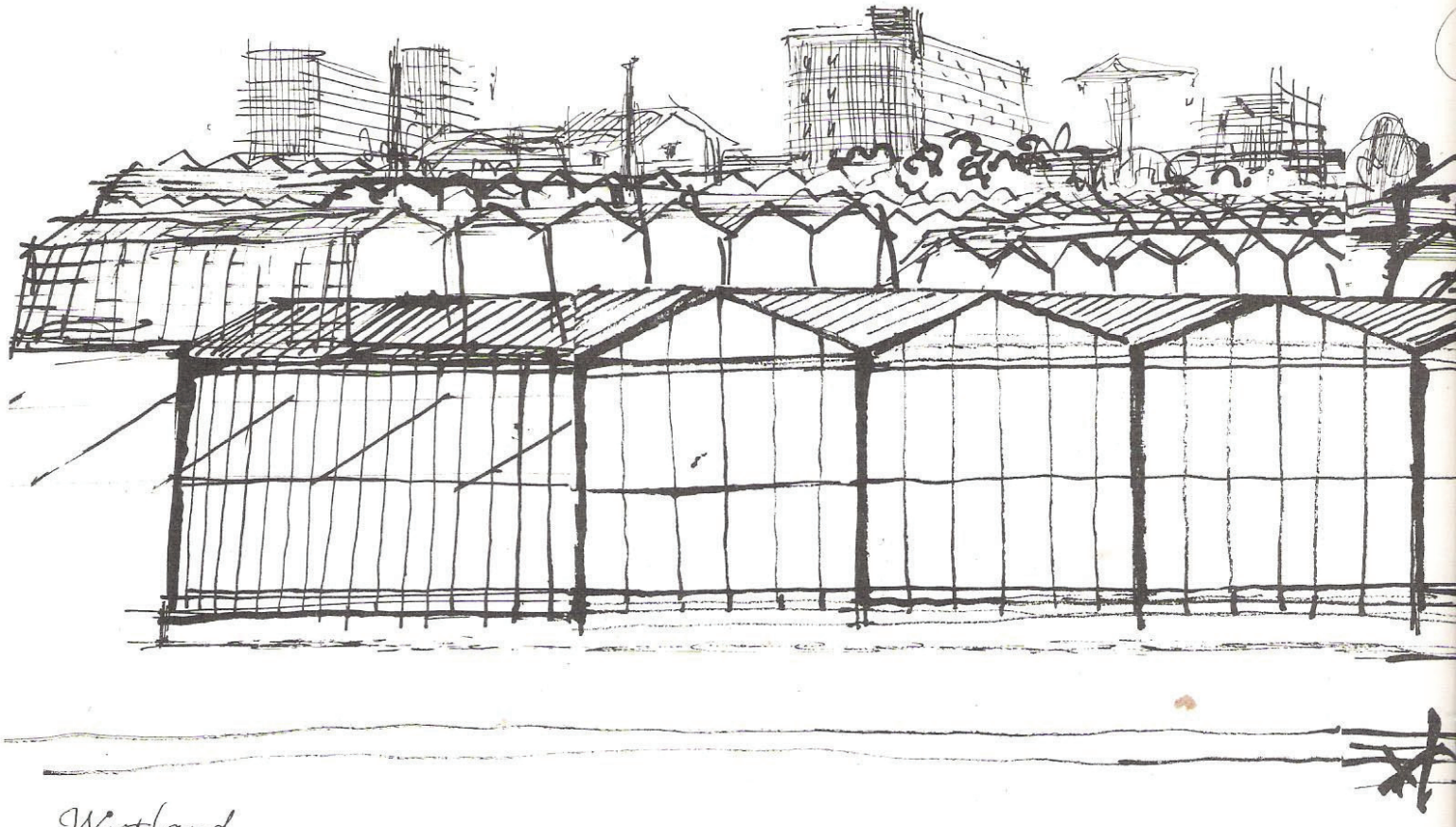
During the seventeenth century, Royalist landowners fled from England to the Netherlands and to Flanders, which is now in the Dutch-speaking, northern part of Belgium. Farmers there on the 'barrenest, Heathie and Sandie Lands' were already producing magnificent crops of oats and providing winter feed and lush pastures for their cattle by sowing turnips and clover. When the exiles returned to England after the Restoration they, too, started growing clover and planting turnips on light soils, which ushered in the English agricultural 'revolution' before the famous, but now discredited, 'Turnip' Townshend was even born. (Dutch engineers were employed during the same century to drain the Fens on the east coast of England.)

The Dutch have always been agricultural innovators. The modern steel and galvanised-iron Dutch barn may be seen in many parts of the world. In the northern provinces of the Netherlands, you can see the modern version and the original side by side, with the thatched roof supported by four stout poles at each corner, which can be raised or lowered to provide

a covering for the hay beneath. The Dutch have always been one of the leaders in food processing, from salted herring, introduced by William Beukels of Zeeland in the fourteenth century, to margarine which was first extensively produced in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century.
These traditions continue today. The black and white Frisian cow has been exported to many different countries. Dutch cows give the highest milk yields in the world: 300 million gallons are produced each year in Friesland alone. Much of this is made into processed products – butter, cheese,

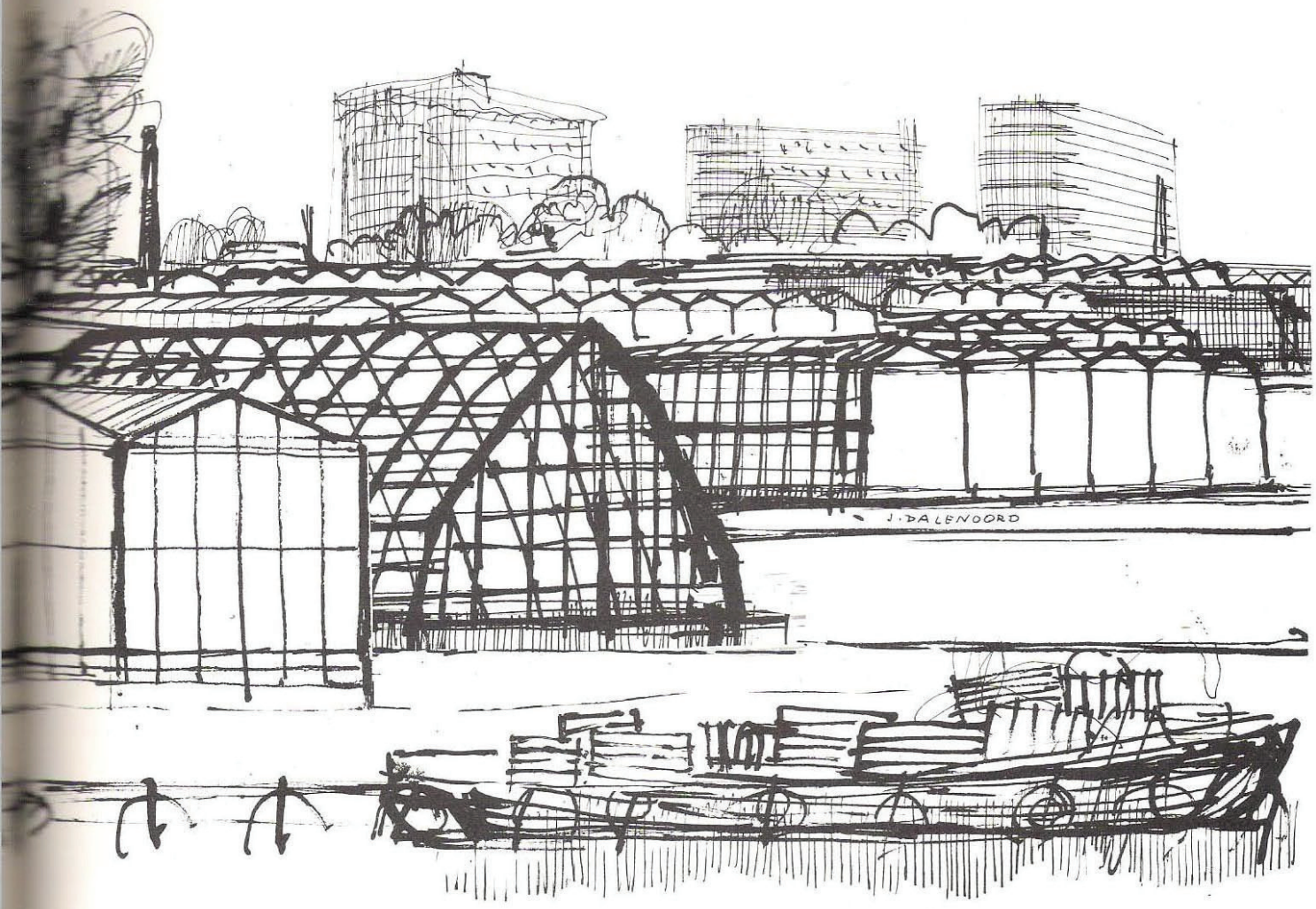
condensed and powdered milk – often by co-operatives, as in the huge condensed milk plant at Leeuwarden. There are big exports of these processed products. Gouda and Edam cheeses are sold to many countries, though unfortunately some of the even more interesting cheeses, such as Leidsekaas, filled with caraway seeds, and others, are rarely sent abroad. (Unfortunately they are not usually available at dinner in most Dutch restaurants, as cheese is only eaten at breakfast, lunch or as a snack with drinks).

The Dutch are also renowned for their flowers, tulips, and



Westland

vegetables, those tomatoes, carrots, cabbages, and peppers, red and green, which appear for sale, crisp and eatable, in many shops abroad and often at a lower price than home-produced varieties. Horticulture plays a significant part in the Dutch economy. About 5 per cent of the total land area is given over to it. Half of the total acreage of horticultural glass in Europe is in the Netherlands. But statistics and impressions can be misleading. Some small farms have been unable to survive within the framework of the Common Market. Many fruit farmers have been unable to compete with the more



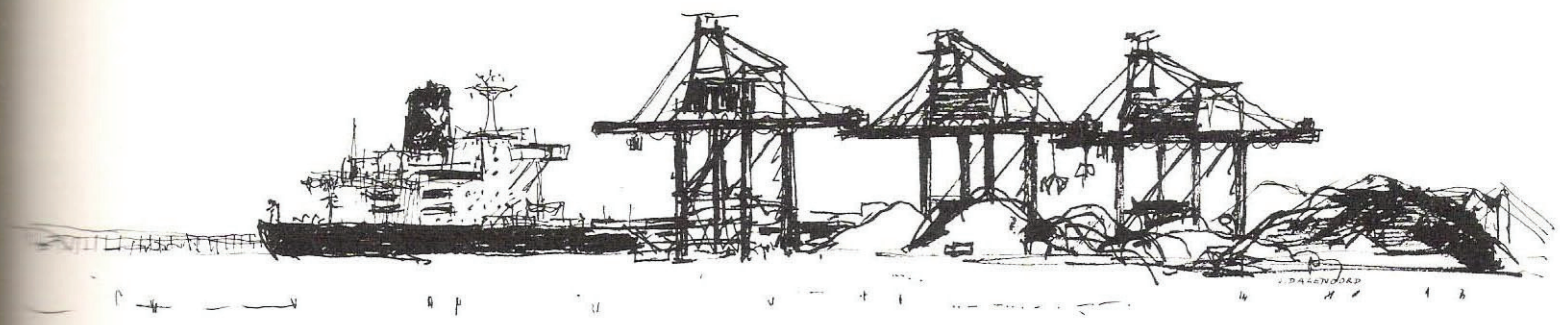
favourably situated Italian farmers. Farms have been engrossed. Old orchards have been rooted up and replaced by newer varieties of trees with the aid of subsidies. Tractors have replaced horses. In 1890 agriculture and fishing employed one-third of the total working population; in 1969 they employed only 7 per cent. There has been a great drift from the land. As a result, the *Randstad* has become even more crowded, and there have arisen serious problems of under-employment and an ageing population in the farming regions.

'It's a difficult choice for us,' someone told me in Leeuwarden, the capital city of Friesland. 'If more jobs are provided, we may lose our peace, our quietness, our good, clean air. But if we don't attract more industry, we shall end up with nothing but old people.' The choice has already been made. In 1971 more people went to live in Friesland than the number who left to live elsewhere.

Much has already been done to bring new industry to the north. The fate of the region was entirely changed by the discovery near Groningen of the largest natural gasfields in western Europe. Miles of piping have been laid under the earth, under the rivers, under the canals, to take the gas to all parts of the Netherlands and to neighbouring countries as a truly invisible and very profitable export. The sea bed is being probed incessantly by drilling rigs for oil. At the port of Delfzijl on the river Eems, there is a new kind of off-shore structure – a modern hotel built on stilts and connected to the land by a covered arcade. Industrialisation is beginning to show. Delfzijl has been expanded as an industrial zone, using natural gas, with the country's first aluminium smelter among the modern plants. Further down river, only a few miles away, a new industrial port has been built at Eemshaven, to handle ships of up to 40,000 tons at present and up to 70,000 tons later. In an effort to attract even more industry to the north, natural gas is sold at a discount to manufacturers, and there are other incentives including investment grants, extended credits and training allowances.

The problems are of a different kind in the southern province of Limburg, though they are directly connected with the developments in the north. With the discovery of such large

deposits of natural gas, and the easy access to coal in other member-states of the European Community, it was boldly decided to stop coal-mining in the Netherlands altogether. Coal has only been mined on any large scale since 1902, when the State set up an enterprise, DSM, to open four pits in the Heerlen area of Limburg. Three of the mines were closed between 1965 and 1970 and the last, the Emma-Hendrik, is to be closed in 1973. All the private mines in the area are also due to shut by 1980. The policy is irreversible: the mines are allowed to flood and the shafts are filled with concrete.



Roosenburg

The closing of the coal mines could have brought industrial decay, if not death, to Limburg. But in the 1950s DSM decided to expand in the chemicals and plastics field, which it had already entered in 1930 with the production of fertilisers. Natural gas, in which DSM has a 40 per cent share, is piped in from the north; chemical and product pipelines connect their plants with Rotterdam and the Ruhr. Just as the polders give the impression of living at the creation of the world, so, in Limburg, one seems to be living at some vast turning point in man's constant effort to create a new life for himself. The huge, surface shafts, sheds and covered galleries of the coal mine stand empty, unused now except for storage, like some vast memorial to a disappearing industrial age when men were sent into the black bowels of the earth to claw out the coal. A few miles away, at Beek and Geleen, there is the new industrial life: acres of ground are covered with miles of piping and tubes of differing shapes and colours, dominated by tall chimneys, distillation columns and towers. As in a coal mine, the main production process remains concealed. Only the result can be observed: millions of coloured plastic balls streaming down from loading hoppers into plastic bags hour after hour, night and day.

The transformation of the region has been handled with characteristic Dutch care and attention to detail. It has not been easy to deal with the loss of all jobs in the major industry in a space of ten or fifteen years. Older miners have been prematurely retired with a pension. Some of the younger men have been retrained, exchanging their chipped, coal-grimed helmets for the new white helmet of the chemical worker. Others now work in new factories which have been attracted to the area, including a Daf car plant. Others have been found jobs elsewhere by the DSM personnel department, which has willingly reversed its function of finding people for jobs to finding jobs for people. Up to five of six trips have been laid on for miners to show them new work and living conditions in other parts of the country, though like miners elsewhere, with their deep attachment to their village, and community, their pigs, or goats or sheep, they are not easily persuaded to leave. But DSM is justifiably proud of what it calls its 'social

operation', which has attracted great interest in other countries, including England, where there are similar problems of structural economic change still to be dealt with.

Four out of ten Dutch workers are employed in industry, which is now by far the biggest sector in the economy. What kind of a life does the average factory worker lead?

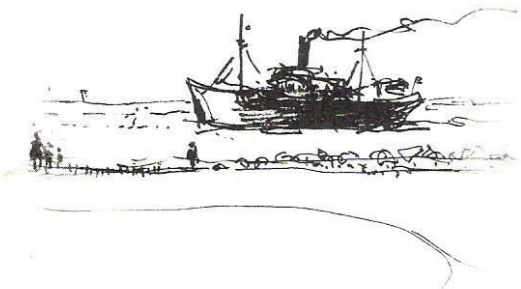
Most likely he lives in a post-war house or block of flats, which has a storage space underneath for the family's bicycles and an open area where he can tinker with his car. (More than two-thirds of Dutch families have a car.)

He starts the day with a typically large Dutch breakfast – a choice of white or brown bread, pumpernickel, or gingerbread with slices of ham or cheese, cut into wafer-thin slices with a special slicer, an egg maybe, margarine instead of butter, jam, and more often now tea instead of coffee. Probably he goes to work on a moped, of which there are nearly 2 million in the country, or a bicycle, of which there are 6 million. The factory in which he works is probably built of brick with glass-covered bridge-walks leading from one section to another, large windows, and with lawns and trees surrounding it. Like 40 per cent of all the other workers he belongs to a union, which is affiliated to one of the three large federations, socialist, Catholic and Protestant. He has only been on strike once in his working life – in 1960. (Since the end of the war the Dutch have had far fewer strikes than most European countries, though the number of strikes has increased in the last few years.)

He works a 42-hour week, five days a week, about the same number of hours as the office workers, who start work at 8.15. In 1970 his gross wage, including his holiday bonus and the family allowance for his two children, came to about £33 a week. His wages are linked to the cost of living and can rise automatically by up to 6 per cent a year. About 27 per cent of his wages is deducted for tax and social security payments which provides him with one of the best governmenty guaranteed social securit systems in the world. If he is ill or unemployed he receives 80 per cent of his wages for a year and

a somewhat lower percentage after that. His whole family is covered by a National Sick Fund, which protects 70 per cent of the population. (Richer people have to pay, or insure themselves.) The health service provides a full range of treatment free, or for a small fee. He knows that when he retires at the age of 65 he will receive the basic State pension, which was about £807 a year for a married couple in 1972, plus the pension from the supplementary scheme which is compulsory in most industries. There is some talk of bringing the State pension up to the level of the minimum wage which was about £20 a week in 1972.

Although there is a cafetaria in the factory, he takes sandwiches to work just as many of the office workers and executives do. The Dutch – apart from farmers – rarely eat a large cooked lunch. When he is at home he usually has open sandwiches of meat, fish, cheese or sausage, or sometimes a slice of beef or ham on a slice of bread topped by one or two fried eggs, which is preceded in the winter by a cup of soup. With it, he drinks a glass of milk: the Dutch family drinks on average about three pints a day, though the amount is now declining a little. His main meal comes in the evening, between six and seven. Soup, which is usually home-made, is followed by a meat or fish course of some kind, served with fresh vegetables and gravy. At one time, there would have been mounds of potatoes, but the Dutch now eat fewer than the British, the Germans, or the French. For dessert, there may be *vla*, a kind of flavoured custard, which his wife buys ready-prepared from the milkman, stewed or fresh fruit. Sometimes he has a glass of beer with his meal and he often has a cigar after it.



After dinner, he likes to settle down at home with his family and relax. He reads the newspaper thoroughly: Dutch men and women spend on average three-quarters of an hour a day on their paper. He reads a book, or he watches the television, while his two children do their homework on the dining room table. Sometimes they have friends in for tea, coffee and cakes or beer at 8.0 or 8.30 in the evening. On other nights he goes out to have a drink with his friends in a local bar.

Occasionally he takes his family to the cinema, but they go

there much less than they once did. He doesn't drink or gamble much, though he does buy a share in a State lottery ticket at work six times a year. (He hasn't won anything yet, but he's still hoping!) He is careful with his money, but not mean. If he really wants something – a new washing machine, a television, a refrigerator – he saves up for it: hire purchase accounts for only 3 per cent of all consumer spending.

One of the real passions and pleasures of his life is football; he played goalkeeper for his local team when he was a younger man. Now, every week during the season, he takes along the club's colours to wave and cheer on his team – Ajax of Amsterdam, Feyenoord of Rotterdam, or one of the other Dutch soccer clubs. In 1971 he was one of the 20,000 Dutch men and women who flew over to London to see Ajax win the European cup at Wembley. The previous year it had been won by their main Dutch rivals, Feyenoord, who also won the unofficial world cup. In 1972 Ajax scored the double, too, by winning both the European and unofficial world cups.

Another thing he likes to do at the weekends or in the summer evenings is to work on his small garden allotment away from home, which he uses now not so much for growing vegetables as for cultivating flowers in rectangular clumps, rather like a miniature tulip field. A little white gate opens on to a cinder path which leads through the allotment to a small shed, which with its stove, its table, its bunks, and its curtains at the window has become almost like a second miniature home, a permanent picnic or camping site of his own.

In the summer the whole family goes off by car to Spain, Italy or France, in search of the sun. Before they had a car they used to fly to these countries on a package tour. He gets three weeks' paid holiday a year and a holiday bonus, which amounts to 7 per cent of his annual wages. In addition there are seven public holidays – New Year's Day, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and the Queen's birthday.

Is he well off? Certainly, he is much better off than he was ten or fifteen years ago. Between 1958 and 1967 wages in the Netherlands rose much faster proportionately than they did in the other five original member-countries of the European

Community and over twice as fast as they did in Britain. (The increase in gross national product per head of the population was the highest, too.) But during that period, prices also rose. According to some surveys, they are still somewhat lower than they are in other Community countries. But it depends on what you're buying. International price comparisons are notoriously misleading. If an Englishman wants to buy English bacon in the Netherlands he's going to find it expensive to do so, just as a Dutchman who wants to buy cigars in England will find that they cost about four times as much. The standard of living of the Dutch worker is not the highest in Europe; but neither is it by any means the lowest. It is probably somewhere around the median, but it has been going up much faster than in other European countries for the last ten years or so.

Since the end of the war there has been a great redistribution of wealth in the Netherlands. The Dutch are one of the highest taxed nations in Europe, though not *the* highest. Income tax is steeply progressive with the rich paying far more proportionately than the poor. More money is raised by direct than by indirect taxation: 56 per cent in the Netherlands, against 46 per cent in Britain, 41 per cent in West Germany, and 27 per cent in France.

Partly for these reasons, the contrasts in living styles between the different social classes are much less marked than in some other countries. People of all classes ride bicycles. They all eat more or less the same kind of meals. There is a greater democratisation in shopping with the specialist shops which deal in leather goods, china, jewellery, for example, not being selectively divided from each other according to the class of customer, but selling a wide range of goods of all prices. Many of the middle classes live in rented homes, like a Dutch educationist I once knew, who lived in a small converted farmhouse on the outskirts of one of the cities in the *Randstad*. With its long, twisting corridors, and mezzanine floor, it was certainly a more interesting place to live in than a system-built flat or a post-war house, and somewhat more

spacious, but it was no better furnished than the homes of many Dutch workers. In other parts of the country Geleen, where there is more space, there are some very fine luxury homes set among wooded hills and little orchards. But in the *Randstad* towns, space and privacy are difficult to obtain and eagerly sought after. Some of the most prized homes are the merchants' houses beside the canals in the bigger cities; many of them have been converted into offices, but some are still occupied by families. They make delightful homes with their tall, well-proportioned rooms, large windows, and often a small enclosed garden or courtyard. One house that I once visited in Amsterdam, had been renovated and restored by a senior civil servant. The drawing room was furnished with splendid antique chests and cupboards, chairs and tables – heirlooms of the family. On a mezzanine floor there was a small private courtyard filled with flowers and plants. The bathroom was a striking contrast of black and white. And at tree-top level there was a studio, stretching the whole length of the house, with a glass-shelved structure at one end to contain those small objects – shells, vases, stones – so beloved by the Dutch. It was a really delightful home.

You need to be really rich to obtain total privacy in the *Randstad*. One man I know lives in a small wooded estate. His house is substantially built and comfortably furnished and contains his collection of old masters, antique tulip vases and china. In the grounds, there is an ultra-modern bungalow where he keeps his Picassos and other works of modern art. Although he is extremely wealthy by Dutch standards, he would not look rich in comparison with some of the landed aristocrats of England. The Dutch have never been ostentatious with their wealth: their religious principles, the shortage of land, and the absence of a court life during the Dutch republic helped to create a tradition of modesty, and of investment in paintings rather than in real estate.

There are, of course, some differences in the way that the various social classes live. Though the middle classes eat much the same kind of food as the workers, they are more likely to have a glass of sherry or a Dutch gin before their meals, though wine with the meal is not common, except on festive

occasions, and among some families in the south. The upper middle classes are more likely to have some form of help in the house – a charwoman who comes in once or twice a week. They also spend more on outside entertainments – concerts, ballet, opera, the theatre, and visits to restaurants on anniversaries and special occasions. Compared with the English, the Dutch tend to eat dinner early and many of the restaurants, even in the big cities, are closed by 10.0 p.m. But like the English, the Dutch have gained a great gastronomic legacy from their former overseas territories and in almost every town there are one or more restaurants supplying Indonesian and/or Chinese food which stay open much later. They are decorated in Indonesian or Chinese style; the waiters in the more expensive places wear native clothes; and at the end of the night it is not uncommon to see the manageress or owner totalling up the evening's takings on an abacus as speedily and as accurately as on a modern electronic calculator. These restaurants serve extremely copious and exotic dishes, including that gourmet meal for gluttons, *rijsttafel* (literally, rice table). This consists of a dozen or more different meat, fish, and vegetable dishes, a bowl of rice, and a bowl of soup. It is a superlatively good meal. (Old hands from the tropics disagree as to how it should be eaten: some maintain that the side dishes should be mixed in with the rice, others say that they should be eaten separately.)

Some of the middle classes have a second holiday – boating in the north, skiing in Switzerland or Austria, or visiting London, Paris or Rome in the off season. A smaller proportion have a second home – a chalet-style bungalow or a converted farm worker's cottage or farmhouse. An even smaller number have a second home abroad, some of them in isolated villages in Ireland or Italy, but most of them in France or Spain.

For the foreigner it is not always easy to differentiate between social classes, though it is easy for the Dutch to do so.

I remember one occasion in the Hague some time ago when a middle-aged man offered to show me the way to an office where I had an appointment. As we walked along, he talked with such passion and concern about the rising unemployment and looked, uncharacteristically for a Dutchman, so down-at-

heel that I thought he had just lost his job. Before we parted, I had discovered my mistake. He was an antique dealer with extensive international connections. Class differences are more apparent to the Dutch, but there are other divisions in society of which they are even more aware and which were, until the last few years, even more important.

The 'pillars of society' has a different meaning in the Netherlands from what it does elsewhere. Religion has always been one of the dominant forces in society. It was one of the main causes of the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule in the sixteenth century. But the Dutch were never – before, during, or even after, the war of independence – entirely Protestant. There was always a large Catholic minority, which was officially proscribed, but which was treated with tolerance in most of the provinces, as the chapel of Our Lord in the Attic in Amsterdam testifies. By the end of the eighteenth century it was estimated that one-third of the population was Catholic. The Catholic hierarchy was re-established in 1853. Nowadays approximately 37 per cent of the population is Catholic.
By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the modern political parties started to be formed, the country was firmly divided on religious lines. The Catholics had great strength in the two southern provinces of Limburg and North Brabant. There were also Protestants, who were particularly numerous in the north and in the islands of Zeeland. The Protestants were not so united as the Catholics. By then they had split into the present two main churches – the Dutch Reformed and the smaller, more doctrinaire Reformed church, which believes that the Calvinist confession should be interpreted literally and should be strictly applied in daily life. As a result of other breakaway movements, there were, and still are, innumerable smaller Protestant sects, including Christian Reformed, Old Reformed, Remonstrant, Free Evangelist, the Netherlands Protestant Union, etc. Some of these smaller sects have strange-sounding beliefs to foreign ears. Not so long ago one sect still firmly believed that, although there was a serpent in the Garden of Eden, it did not speak to Eve, and there are

others who are opposed to all forms of innoculation and insurance.

In addition to these religious groups and political parties based on denominational principles, there were also a number of political parties which had no affiliations to churches. They included the Liberals and the Socialists, both of which had right and left wing factions. In addition smaller sections split off from the Socialists from time to time to form new independent groups or parties with marxist, revolutionary, anarchistic, syndicalist or pacifist tendencies. Futhermore, small groups became detached from some of the main denominational parties and formed independent parties of their own. As a result, there are always at least twenty separate political parties contesting every general election nowadays and no government can ever be formed without the collaboration of several of the five main political parties, so that every government in the Netherlands is always a coalition.

The Dutch are an earnest and committed people, with a fundamentalist tendency to believe implicity in the correctness of their views. Each *bloc* was fighting for its own emancipation; the political parties which were formed reflected their views. The first of the modern political parties to be created in 1878, the Anti-revolutionary party, was started by the more doctrinaire Protestants to combat the secularising effects of the French revolution. Other parties followed: Liberal, Socialist, Catholic, and another Protestant party – the Christian Historical Union. But all of them were much more than political parties in the normal sense. They were fighting not just for political power alone, but for religious faith, deep convictions, a total way of life. The party leaders sought to isolate and contain their supporters in separate organisations; as a reward, the leaders tried to provide their supporters with institutions of their own. The three main divisions – Catholic, Protestant and 'neutral' – gradually came to penetrate every sphere of society. It was not only political parties which were organised in this way, but also trade unions and schools. A boy or a girl could be educated in institutions of his own religious faith from the age of four to thirty, first in a kindergarten run by members of his church, then at a denominational school, and finally at the

Protestant Free University of Amsterdam or at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. People could read newspapers coloured by their own views and borrow books from Catholic, Protestant, or non-denominational libraries. If they were ill, they could be nursed back to health by the 'neutral' Green Cross, the Catholic White-Yellow Cross, or the Protestant Orange-Green Cross organisations. They could play in Catholic or Protestant football leagues, or attend women's organisations where they could be sure to meet people of their own faith or of none.

The associations became so numerous that the Catholics needed a book of a thousand pages to list them. There was even a Catholic goat breeders' association and Catholic, Protestant and 'neutral' pigeon clubs! People lived in self-isolated communities and tended to have friends of their own faith, to buy goods from shopkeepers of the same religious persuasion, to work in firms where all employees had the same religion, or none at all. These three main groupings – Catholic, Protestant and 'neutral' – came to form the pillars of the society. The Dutch call this process *verzuiling*, or pillarisation, and some of them see not just three pillars, but four, or even five: Catholic, Protestant, doctrinaire Protestant, Liberal, and Socialist.

However many pillars there were, there can be no doubt that they succeeded in maintaining a stable, if sometimes wasteful, divided, and rather inward-looking society, for fifty years or more. It made people exaggerate their divisions and differences. Even as late as 1954 it was possible for the Catholic bishops to issue a pastoral letter prohibiting Catholics from joining a Socialist union or listening to Socialist broadcasts, a prohibition which would be unthinkable in the Netherlands nowadays.

Verzuiling still exists today, notably in the radio and television networks, which have no parallel anywhere in the world. Programmes are produced not by a public corporation and companies as they are in Britain, nor by commercial companies as they are in the United States, but by non-profit-making organisations representing different religious and political views. There are six separate organisations: AVRO, which is neutral with Liberal undertones; TROS, which is also neutral; KRO, Catholic; NCRV, orthodox Protestant; VPRO, latitudinarian Protestant; and VARA, Socialist. There is also a national organisation, NOS, which provides the main news, discussion, general interest and musical programmes, and is also responsible, among other things, for the operation and the installation of radio and television broadcasting equipment. Thus all the main pillars are represented. The associations are allocated broadcasting time in proportion to the number of people who subscribe to their weekly programme guides.

But under the pressures of modern life and industrialisation some of the pillars have started to crumble. The divisions don't mean nearly as much to most of the young generation as they still do to some of the old. Intermarriage between people of different religious faiths, which was at one time unusual, particularly in the more remote provinces, is now commonplace, especially in the large cities. The need for mobility, created by modern industry, has made Catholics take jobs in the north and Protestants in the south, helping to erode the old north-south divisions. Universities have been freed, with Catholic students and lecturers at the Free Univeristy of Amsterdam, and Protestant students and professors at Catholic Nijmegen. But the system of providing three different schools – Protestant, Catholic and 'neutral' – still persists even in some of the newer polder villages. These schools are all subsidised by the State, as is guaranteed by the law, so that parents can have the kind of education for their children that they want. But even in schools, where pillarisation was most entrenched, there are signs of change. The first school for all three groups – Catholic, Protestant, and 'neutral' – has been opened at Zoetermeer, near the Hague. And in the predominantly Catholic south, some Catholic parents, who have come from other parts of the country, send their children to Protestant secondary schools, because they are less crowded and their children can receive more intensive attention.

What has helped to lessen the divisions in society is the changing balance of religious faiths and the growth in the number of people who are members of no church, the 'unchurchly' as the Dutch call them. In 1960, the Catholics became the largest religious group in the Netherlands for the first time, having more adherents than all Protestant churches combined. The Catholics are no longer a minority, fighting as they did before the last war for full emancipation in public appointments and commercial jobs. They have felt able to relax and under the leadership of the Dutch primate, Cardinal Alfrink, to adapt to the new, open society. The mass media of the world have concentrated on the more sensational aspects of the Dutch Catholics 'new look' – such as the married priests and the friction with the Vatican – and have tended to ignore

the real purpose of the change, which is to create a more open and democratic church in accordance with the liberalising spirit of the Second Vatican Council and to bring about a greater sharing of responsibility by bishops and laity. In an attempt to find a new method of exercising authority in the modern Church, an experimental Pastoral Council was established in 1968, which included laymen, priests, and representatives of other churches as well as the bishops. The Council, which conducts its discussions under the glare of television lights, makes recommendations to the bishops, who have supported

all the major changes which have been proposed. At the same time, the two main Protestant churches have started to come closer to each other, partly through the growing ecumenical movement. And some of the smaller Protestant sects have started to shake off some of their more rigid beliefs. In Staphorst, one of the strictest Protestant villages, most parents defied their pastor's advice and had their children inoculated during a polio epidemic there in 1971.

These conflicting views still have their spokesmen in the lower house of Parliament, which is elected for a four-year term under a system of proportional representation. Ever since the end of the war there have been representatives of up to a dozen or more different parties in the 150-member house, including the Communist, the Pacifist-Socialist, and the Political Reformed party, which wants a theocratic state. As society has become less rigidly structured, support for the smaller parties has grown considerably, while support for the confessional parties has declined. The most spectacular breakthrough was made by a new party, D'66, which won seven seats at its first appearance at the national polls in 1967 and 11 in 1971 though it was reduced to six seats at the general elections of 1972. It wants to see more grass-roots democracy, and an even freer and more open society. A right-of-centre Socialist party, DS 70, gained eight seats at the 1971 election, which was reduced to six in 1972.

Since the end of the war the majority of votes have gone to the Big Five – the Catholic, Socialist, Liberal, and the two main Protestant parties – but none of them has ever had sufficient support to form a goverment by itself. This could have produced a highly unstable situation, but for one other major characteristic of the Dutch. Although they are men of causes and convictions, they are also realists and prepared eventually to compromise. *Verzuiling* produced rigid divisions at the bottom of society, but there was always toleration and compromise at the top. After every election it usually takes many weeks for the Big Five party leaders to form a new coalition government from among themselves, with the

majority of the parties participating and one or two staying out and forming the opposition for the next governmental period. But once such a coalition has been formed it tends to be fairly stable.

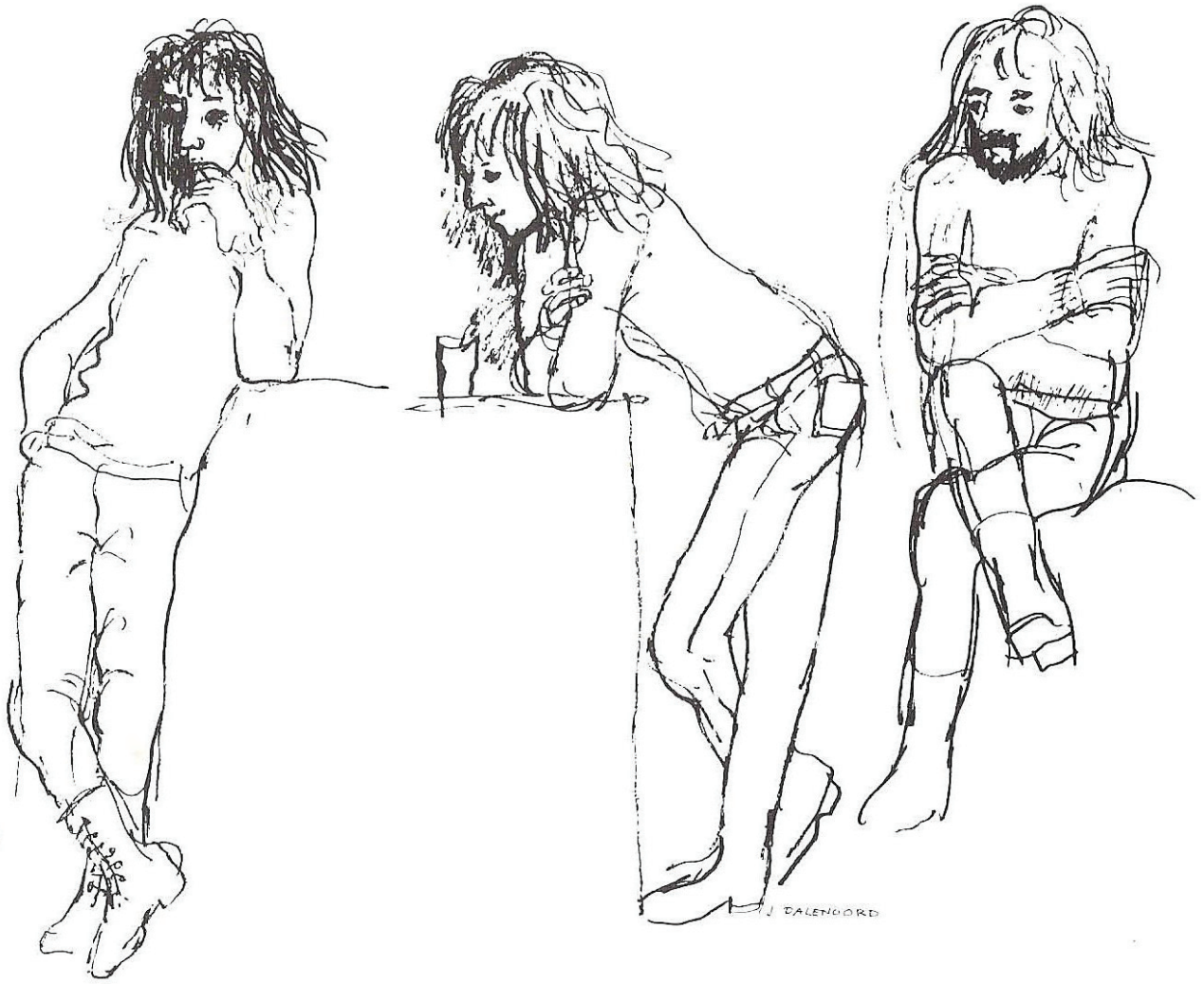
The Dutch have one of the most complex and subtle systems of government in the world, combining some of the best aspects of other democracies. As in the United States, ministers are not members of parliament, or even necessarily ex-members, though they may speak as ministers in either house and regularly do so. However, a minister has no role in parliament. But, as in Britain, parliament is sovereign and has the final right to vote a government out of office and also to reject or to amend any Bill. Under this dualistic system, the government is expected to govern, which it does with a mixture of paternalism and technocratic and managerial skill. It is not unknown for a minister to bring a blackboard into parliament to help elucidate points for deputies: the Dutch take a great delight in organisational charts, complicated plans, and foundations.

Members of parliament represent basically the pure clear voice of uncompromising principle. It is common for deputies to vote against the government, even though it contains members of their own party. This may seem an unwieldy way of running a country, but the Dutch can do this daily, multiple balancing act with uncommon skill. A similar system is used with equal effectiveness in the municipal councils. The government-appointed, salaried burgomaster and the aldermen, who are elected by the council from its own members, together take the place of the government, and the members of the council act as the parliament. Government can be strong and stable, while minority voices can be heard in the corridors of power. It gets the best of both worlds – something for which the Dutch seem to have a special facility.

The stability of Dutch society has its roots deep in Dutch history. In the nineteenth century, the government succeeded in gaining full ministerial responsibility from the king, twenty years before parliament learnt to exercise its power. Industry developed late, so that the bourgeoisie was firmly entrenched long before an industrial proletariat appeared, except in a few

cities such as Amsterdam. Even earlier than that, the ruling regents and the merchants of the cities had created a stable, middle-of-the-road society, which was in many ways highly civilised, humanitarian and tolerant.

These traditions of tolerance have persisted to the present day. It is doubtful if any other nation treats its rebels – and those of other nations, too – so benignly. When Amsterdam became the magnet for 'freaks' from all over the world, part of the Vondelpark in Amsterdam was given over to the 'summer visitors' and they were left to organise life in their own way.



Tents went up; hawkers moved in; and the police drove round at 8.0 a.m. to see that everything was clean and tidy for the Dutch mothers and their children who wanted to use the park during the day. Not all Dutchmen, or even all Amsterdammers, may have totally approved of these 'summer visitors', and, indeed, the Amsterdammers became incensed when they took over the central Dam square. But it is a remarkable tribute to the tolerance of the city and its people that the 'freaks' and the drop-outs should have chosen Amsterdam as their European 'capital', finding there some, at least, of the values of 'let it be' that they could not discover in their own home countries.

'Ah, but these were foreigners,' some of the Dutch would say. Over the years, many Dutch men and women, particularly the young, have told me that visiting foreigners are often treated more kindly than the natives. This may have been true in the past, and it may not be entirely false today, but any foreign observer must be impressed by the way in which the Dutch rebels and progressives are treated. They are not persecuted by the establishment, but are more often brought inside and encouraged to taste the realities of responsibility and power. Society is stable and is, therefore, not afraid to experiment. The mass media, the church and education have all been infiltrated by progressives. For this reason, change is probably more often implemented from the inside than from the outside in the Netherlands. Rebels are expected to be positive: it is no coincidence that two of the main youthful, radical movements in the last few years have both been highly constructive, in intent, if not always in achievement. In the Sixties, the Provo movement, which was young in spirit if not entirely in age, became one of the major, internationally-known, protest movements. It had positive plans for providing free city transport in Amsterdam with its white-painted bicycles, and its attempts to reduce air pollution – the white chimneys campaign. But within a few years the movement faded away. In the early 1970s, a new group, Kabouters (gnomes or dwarfs) declared itself independent of the established authorities and set up its own alternative ministries: a Ministry of Housing to occupy and to improve derelict houses; a Ministry of Social

Affairs to organise help for old people. It is significant of the change in voters' attitudes, in Amsterdam at least, that both groups should have won seats on the city council, and equally significant of the older tradition of tolerance that their representatives should have been accommodated so well by other members of the council. Like the Provos, the Kabouters were unable to maintain their foothold and the movement lost its power.

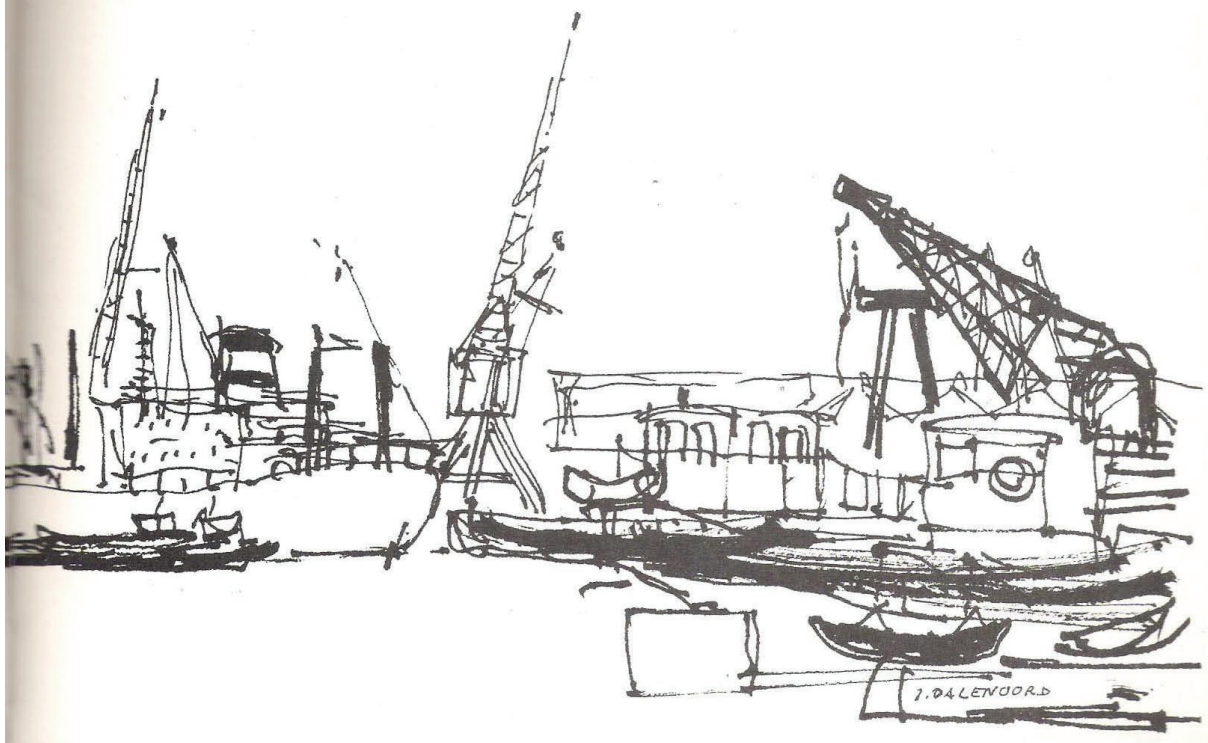
Obviously, Dutch society, like any other, has its faults. To some of the Dutch it can seem stifling, mediocre, second-rate. But then the Dutch are their own sternest critics. They are contemptuous of idle praise and suspicious of flattery. They don't like to hide their defects. When Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was on a State visit to the Netherlands, his official tour took him past the canal barges where some people live in the overcrowded capital. Queen Juliana will break off a tour of a new housing project and talk with genuine sympathy to housewives about the difficulties of raising a family in Amsterdam. Furthermore, you do have a feeling that she knows what she's talking about. When her own four daughters were at the same local school as other children in the area, she often used to collect them herself and take a few of the other children back to their homes in her car. It is this open, unpretentious nature of society – though obviously it is not total – which appeals to me most in the Netherlands. A man – or a woman – is expected to live up to his position; he is only looked down on when he pretends to be something he is not. There is a simple courtesy, a genuine curiosity, and a rugged independence, which seem to be disappearing fast in many other countries.

There have to be rules, particularly in such a crowded country, where there is not much elbow room. But they are not inflexible; if necessary, they can be bent. The Dutch know how to improvise and to deal with emergencies. They do things with a quiet kind of relaxed efficiency, which is very different in its cause and its effect from that to be found in some other countries noted for efficiency. There is not merely a mechanistic following of the rules, but a logical attention to detail.

These characteristics have been latent in Dutch society for many years, but until recently they were overshadowed by other aspects. The transition from a closed to an open society has been made only in the last ten or fifteen years. The major change, on which all the other transformations ultimately depend, has been in industrialisation. The first industrial revolution, based mainly on coal and iron and steel, lasted only a generation or so in the Netherlands. The Dutch went almost straight from a mercantilist empire, refusing to invest in heavy industries at home, into the modern second-stage

Rotterdam Port

industrial economy of today. Even before the last war, firm foundations for the change had been laid. The Dutch were one of the first countries to develop modern multinational companies operating in the growth sectors of petroleum, electronics, food processing, and chemicals.
In the post-war period they have been fortunate to find such large supplies of natural gas – the twentieth-century fuel – in the north and some oil, which now supplies one-fifth of their domestic consumption. Many new industries have been developed. The Dutch make their own cars, the Daf – with its



highly effective automatic transmission system – and their own jet passenger planes, the Fokker Fellowship. (The previous Fokker plane, the turboprop Friendship, has the highest sales of its class in the world.)

Some of their traditional activities, have not been abolished, but modernised and expanded. Food processing still plays a most important part in the economy, with cheese, condensed milk, canned meat, tinned beer and other products being exported in vast quantities. The food, drink and tobacco industry is still slightly bigger in turnover than the metal and engineering industry, with the fastest-growing industry, chemicals, taking third place.

The Dutch have also retained their traditional role as the 'carriers of Europe' – no longer only by sea, but also now by land and air. Rotterdam-Europoort, the biggest port in the world, is the main supply port for the European Community and beyond, with Amsterdam making a significant contribution, too. (There are two hundred million people – equivalent to the population of the United States – living within a 370-mile radius of Rotterdam.) Huge trucks from many different nations thunder along the motorways: more than half of all the international road haulage in the Community starts or ends in the Netherlands. About one-third of the barges chugging along the canals and waterways are foreign: German barges taking a short cut across the Netherlands to northern Germany and Belgian barges taking goods from Antwerp to the Rhine. Schiphol airport, about seven miles from Amsterdam, was rebuilt in 1967 to handle the biggest jumbo jets, and is one of the busiest airports in the European Community.

The transition to a modern industrial state has been accomplished with a minimum of friction. Regular talks between unions and employers were started long before the Second World War. In 1950 a Social-Economic Council was set up with an equal number of representatives of the government, the employers and the unions to advise the government on social and economic questions, which it has done with a considerable degree of success. In the same year, works councils were also established; in 1971, their powers were

extended by law so that they now have to be informed of changes which might affect working conditions, such as mergers and the transfer of work to other premises.

The Dutch really do believe in talks and consultations. Once when I was with a Ministry of Education official he told me that a radical group of teachers, who want freer schools, had published the examination papers, and distributed them, before the examination was held. 'Why couldn't they have discussed it first?' he asked. It was a cry that came direct from his heart.

Industrialisation, however, has brought penalties as well as privileges. In spite of attempts at international control, the Rhine has become a multinational sewer, full of chemical wastes and sewage. Unfortunately for the Dutch they are on the receiving end. It is no longer possible as it was in 1874 to set up a plant in Rotterdam to take good quality, fresh water from the Rhine. Neither is it possible to meet the ever-increasing demands for water from the crowded *Randstad* towns between the Hague and Amsterdam by draining it from the sand dunes along the coast, which act as a natural filter to the rainwater. If too much water is taken out, the dunes become dry and the salt water, which is only a foot or so below the surface, rises up, polluting drinking supplies and making the neighbouring land too salt to grow crops.

The control of water supplies is much less apparent than the creation of new lands from the sea, but it is no less complex or important. Water, which is already partially purified, is piped from the Rhine to the sand dunes, so that more drinking water is available for the crowded cities.

The Zuyder Zee works made Lake IJssel the country's biggest fresh water reservoir. But in dry weather the level of the lakes falls. So a moveable weir has been built west of Arnhem to divert more of the waters of the Rhine up the River IJssel and into the lake. Water is pumped out of the lake every night to flush the canals of Amsterdam and is eventually discharged through the North Sea Canal which connects the capital with the sea. The dams in the Delta project divert more water from the Rhine into the freshwater lakes which have been formed between the islands of Zeeland.

not only in the Netherlands but also in other parts of the world.

In the same way, the government has given the lead in establishing a welfare state, which in addition to the usual benefits, also provides pensions for orphans, which can continue to the age of 27 if they are still students, and even, in some circumstances, public assistance to Dutchmen who are living abroad.

The greatest achievements, perhaps, have been made in the care of the mentally sick and the physically handicapped. The

Jean Pesijnhoffe, Leiden

Dutch were pioneers of the sheltered workshops, of which there are now nearly 200. The handicapped and the mentally sick can work at their own jobs at their own pace, and still receive up to 95 per cent of normal outside wages for doing so. There are a number of half-way homes, supervised by a psychiatrist, in which mental hospital patients can learn to readapt to the outside world. Some patients are boarded out in private homes, while others from the van der Hoeven clinic in Utrecht are regular visitors to some homes in the town. The Dutch Red Cross has a hospital ship, the *Henri Dunant*, which provides a holiday cruise for hundreds of the permanently disabled every year. And near Arnhem there is The Village, *Het Dorp*, where all the residents are severely handicapped people, each living in a bed-sitting room with its own bathroom. Most of the residents are in wheelchairs, but they can get around the village easily even in the worst weather, as the main street is heated and covered with glass. They are not isolated from the world outside: some of the 400 residents work in Arnhem and there are two guest rooms attached to each block of ten dwellings. The money to build The Village – £3,600,000 – was raised by a T.V. appeal in about 24 hours. Another striking innovation has been made in a different sphere- the treatment of criminals. In recent years the Dutch judges have tried the bold experiment of drastically reducing the length of prison sentences, instead of increasing them as in most other countries. There has been no significant increase in the crime rate by international standards. Over two-thirds of the prison population are now serving sentences of less than one year. Many shorter sentences can be served at the weekend and it is not unknown for prisoners to be allowed to return home to attend a family birthday celebration. The last few months of a sentence is usually served in an open prison, which is often almost indistinguishable from the private houses on either side. The prisoners go out every day, without supervision, to do a normal day's work. The fall in the number of prisoners has meant that smaller groups of offenders can be given more intensive care and treatment while they are still inside. It has also created a minor problem of what to do with empty prisons.

Other less severe social problems have produced equally experimental answers. There are special housing projects, with constant care, for 'problem families' in many towns, and a growing number of workshops, where those men who feel too young to retire at 65 can put in a few hours' paid work every week.

Few other small countries, and even some of the larger ones, treat their artists as well as the Dutch do. The government fixes some of the salaries, such as those of musicians, and subsidises pensions. One and a half per cent of the total cost of government buildings and 1 per cent of the cost of schools and universities is earmarked for decorative art – murals, sculpture, stained glass. Artists who can't make a living can be given a commission by a municipal council, which foots one-quarter of the bill, while the government pays the remainder. Every week, Amsterdam alone spends £7,000 to £8,000 on new paintings and sculpture, which can then be borrowed by schools, hospitals and public offices. The government subsidises 20 literary magazines and will also pay for books of exceptional literary merit to be published.

These policies have produced variable results, but there is little doubt that they have helped to contribute to the artistic and cultural renaissance in the Netherlands in the last few years. Amsterdam has become one of the most stimulating and intellectually vital cities in Europe. It has something of the atmosphere of Paris in the Thirties, with its thousand practising artists and sculptors, its American colony, its crowded bars, its intense discussions, and its serious chess players crouched over their boards in the cafés of the Leidseplein.

Everyone has heard of Rembrandt. The Dutch don't want to forget their artistic past, but neither do they want to be perpetually reminded of it. They are living now. And in the last decade or so, their new artistic and cultural achievements have begun to make a significant impact on other countries. Ballet has been officially sponsored for only the last decade or so, but the two main ballet companies formed during that

period have already made an international reputation. Rudolph Nureyev has danced with the Dutch National Ballet in an experimental electronic ballet written by choreographer Rudi van Dantzig. Of the other company, the Netherlands Dance Theatre, the *Times* critic, John Percival, has said that it has set 'a new style in ballet companies which has now been copied successfully in Britain, America and Europe'. Opera has an equally short history, and unfortunately the money has not yet been found to build the much-needed, but extremely costly, opera house, so that the Netherlands Opera Foundation has to use the main theatre in Amsterdam for most of its performances, with tours to other *Randstad* towns. But a number of Dutch singers have recently achieved international fame, particularly Gré van Swol-Brouwesteyn, Christine Deutekom and Elly Ameling.

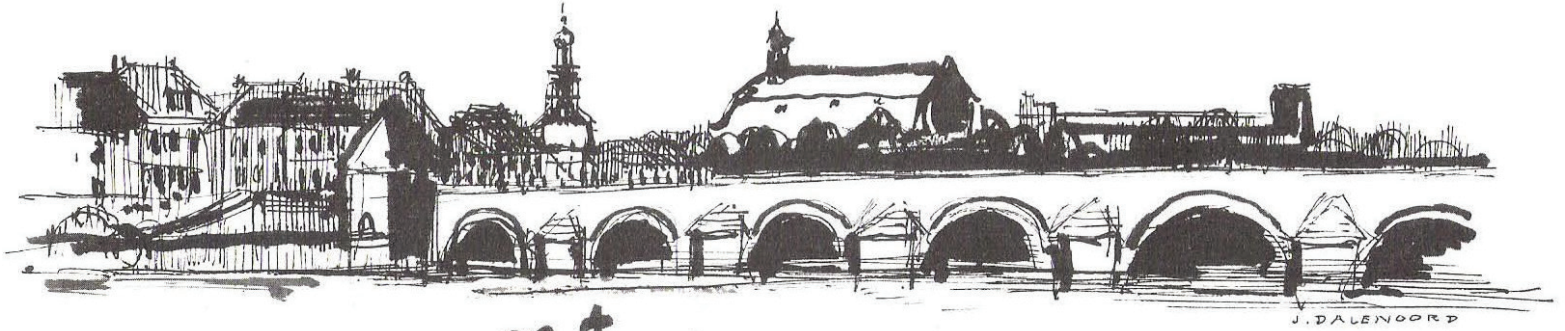
Music has a longer history. There are few families in which someone does not play a musical instrument of some kind or sing in a choir. The Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, now under conductor Bernard Haitink, has had a high international reputation for many years. There are nine other full orchestras in the country and a number of smaller chamber-music groups, some of which are beginning to attract foreign attention. Government subsidies have helped to encourage the composition of many new symphonies, electronic works and audio-visual experiments. Among the modern composers whose work is well-known abroad are Willem Pijper and Henk Badings. Painting – the traditional art of the Netherlands – has again brought a number of Dutchmen into international prominence. Among the established artists there are Appel, Corneille and Co Westerik, while younger painters are to be found among the leaders of the latest international trends. Because of the language difficulty, Dutch literature is less well known than it should be abroad, as it always has been ever since the time of Joost van den Vondel, the seventeenth-century poet and playwright, their greatest writer: but much accomplished work is now being produced. The Dutch literary scene has changed dramatically in the last fifteen years as a new generation of writers has responded to the fundamental changes in society with intelligence, skill, and

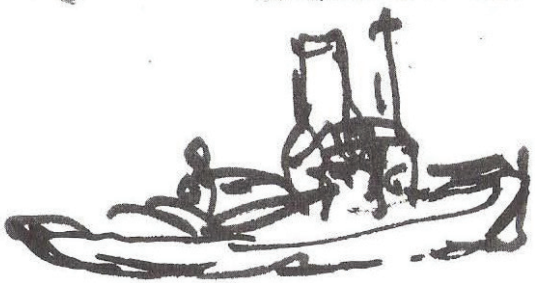
far less earnestness than some foreigners might expect. The highly experimental novel, poetry, and polemical pieces have all had a considerable vogue. The most prominent writers are Simon Vestdijk, Gerard Kornelis van het Reve, Jan Wolkers, Willem Frederik Hermans and Harry Mulisch, though there are many others who are well worthwhile reading.
In the cinema, some prize-winning documentaries have been made by directors such as Bert Haanstra and in the last few years there have been one or two interesting longer films.
And so one could go on. In many spheres the Dutch have started to make a mark again. In football, there are the highly professional teams of Ajax and Feyenoord, where a few years ago, there were only amateurs; in tennis, Tom Okker and Betty Stöve; in cycling, Jan Janssen, who won the *Tour de France* in 1968; in judo, Anton Geesink, who has beaten the Japanese at their own game, and Wim Ruska, who won two gold medals in the Olympic games at Munich in 1972.
In international affairs they have taken an increasingly active role in Atlantic co-operation and European integration, with Dr. Joseph Luns, their long-serving ex-Foreign Minister, now at the time of writing, being Secretary-General of Nato, and with Sicco Mansholt as ex-Commission president of the European Community. They still maintain their links with the wider world, particularly through the establishment in 1954 of a reorganised Kingdom of the Netherlands, which includes their former overseas territories of Surinam, on the north-eastern coast of South America, and two groups of islands in the Carribbean – the Netherlands Antilles. Each territory has full autonomy in its domestic affairs each with its own elected parliament and a ministerial cabinet, but the Netherlands looks after defence and foreign policy in consultation with the two territories.

It is not only the achievements of the post-war period that makes the Netherlands such an interesting society today. There is something else of even greater import. The German poet Heinrich Heine once said that if the world were coming to an end he would go to the Netherlands, where everything happens

fifty years later. There may have been some truth in the remark in the nineteenth century, but the opposite is true today. The Netherlands is a better indicator of the future than of the past. So many of the contemporary problems which now afflict industrial nations in other parts of the world have been experienced by the Dutch for many years: a great density of population, pollution, shortage of water supplies and of raw materials, lack of living and recreational space. At the same time, many aspects of Dutch life, both large and small, which have been common for the last fifty years or so, or even longer, have only recently appeared elsewhere: multinational companies, consensus politics, physical planning, high taxation for increased social services, cycling for health reasons, and yachting (a Dutch word in origin) as one of the last means of escape into solitude. 'Going dutch' has become fashionable again.

The philosophy that activates Dutch society is a simple one. It is a recognition that each individual has to face the responsibilities of living in a community, but that the community should encourage the individual to remain independent nevertheless. The Dutch know that their country is small: they wouldn't like to exaggerate their virtues or their capabilities any more than they want to hide their defects. But if this is going to be the pattern of living in the future, 1984 isn't going to be so terrible after all.





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Published by: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, Netherlands
Production: Netherlands Information Service, The Hague
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Lay-out: Ton van Riel
Printed by: The Netherlands Government Printing Office

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